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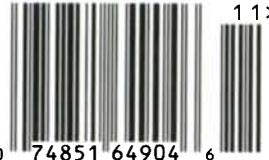
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to the frying pan.**

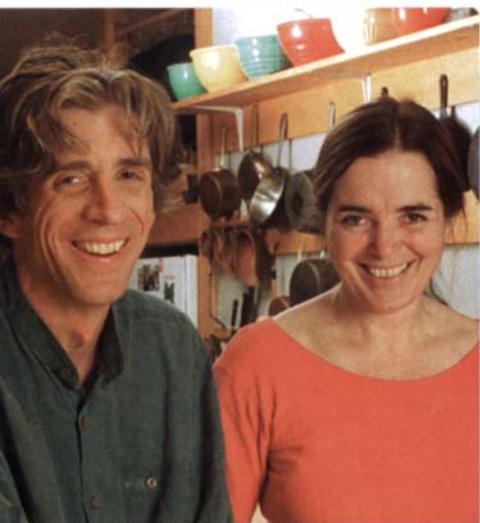
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Jeffrey Alford and Naomi Duguid

("*Tandoor-Style Flatbreads*," p. 72), travellers, cooks, photographers, and writers, have worked together since they met in Tibet in 1985. Their interest is in understanding daily home-cooked foods in their cultural context. They spend several months each year travelling, sometimes separately, sometimes together with their children. Their first cookbook, *Flatbreads & Flavors: A Baker's Atlas*, was named James Beard Cookbook of the Year, as was their recent book, *Hot Sour Salty Sweet*. For more about Naomi and Jeffrey, see their web site, www.hotsoursaltsweet.com.

other on the first day of classes at the Culinary Institute of America at Hyde Park, New York, and they've been together ever since. As the chef-owners of Magnolia Grill in Durham, North Carolina, the pair have won nominations and awards from the James Beard Foundation and numerous magazines for their bold and original cooking. Karen and Ben are the authors of *Not Afraid of Flavor—Recipes from Magnolia Grill*. They live in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Author **Pam Anderson** ("Waffles," p. 62) is following up her first two books—*The Perfect*

Recipe and How to Cook Without a Book—with a third, entitled *CookSmart*, due out next spring. *How to Cook Without a Book* was nominated for a James Beard award. Pam

writes a column for *USA Weekend* and teaches cooking across the country.

Deborah Madison ("Vegetable Stews," p. 66) was a founding chef of Greens restaurant in San Francisco. She's the author of *Vegetarian Cooking for Everyone* (which won IACP Cookbook of the Year and James Beard awards) as well as *The Greens Cookbook* (reissued this year). A passionate champion of organic farming and sustainable agriculture, Deborah is at work on a book about America's farmers' markets, due out next June. She lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Jim Peyton ("Enchiladas," p. 77) is the author of *El Norte: The Cuisine of Northern Mexico, La Cocina de la Frontera: Mexican-American Cooking from the Southwest*, and *Jim Peyton's New Cooking from Old Mexico*. He lives in San Antonio, Texas, but spends time in his hometown of La Jolla, California, and in Mexico, where he continues his search for recipes. In addition to giving classes, he teaches Mexican cuisine on his web site, www.lomexicano.com.

Abigail Johnson Dodge ("Sear & Slice Steak Dinners," p. 44, and "Upside-Down Cakes," p. 82) is a contributing editor for *Fine Cooking* and has been the magazine's test kitchen director for eight years. She wrote *Great Fruit Desserts* and *The Kids' Cookbook* and was a contributor to *The New Joy of Cooking*. She's working on *Dessert*, due out this spring. Abby's passion for pastry was fueled by studying at La Varenne in France and working under French masters Michel Guerard and Guy Savoy. She lives in Connecticut.



Molly Stevens ("Onion Soup," p. 49) is the co-author with Roy Finamore of *One Potato, Two Potato*, due out this month. As a *Fine Cooking* contributing editor, Molly is often on

the road demonstrating recipes and teaching classes. The rest of the time she's in Vermont, where the long winters give her plenty of opportunity to work on her soup recipes.

Three outstanding chefs contributed to "Great Roast Chicken" (p. 52), the first in our new feature series called "Three Methods for...." **Daniel Boulud** is the chef-owner of three New York City restaurants: the highly

acclaimed Daniel, the more casual Café Boulud, and the recently opened DB Bistro Moderne. Daniel grew up on his family's farm outside Lyon, France, and trained under France's most renowned chefs. He is the author of *Cooking with Daniel Boulud* and co-author with Dorie Greenspan of *Daniel Boulud's Café Boulud Cookbook*. **Tom Douglas** is the chef-owner of Dahlia Lounge, Etta's Seafood, and Palace Kitchen, all in Seattle. He wrote *Seattle Kitchen: A Food Lover's Cookbook & Guide* and has won numerous awards, including the James Beard award for Best Northwest Chef in 1994. **Stephan Pyles**, a fifth-generation West Texan, is often called one of the founding fathers of Southwestern cuisine. Routh Street Café, which he opened in 1983, racked up many awards during Stephan's ten-year reign, as did his next restaurant, Star Canyon. He's written several books, including *The New Texas Cuisine*. Stephan left the restaurant world last year to focus on researching, writing, consulting, teaching, and producing television cooking shows.

Twenty years ago, **Karen and Ben Barker** ("Sweet Potatoes," p. 56) sat next to each



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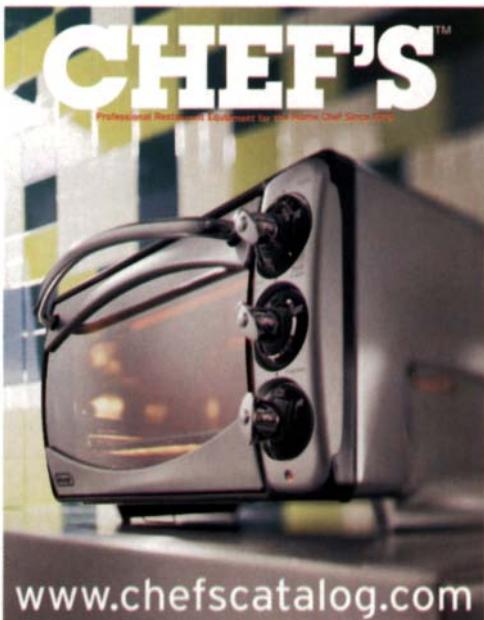
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FROM THE EDITOR

Cooking without a kitchen

Even though you're probably reading this issue in early fall, it's still summer as we push toward press time. We're looking ahead to next summer's articles, testing recipes using the season's best corn on the cob, fat tomatoes, sweet berries and...oops, where's our test kitchen?

We're renovating it, actually, and in fact will end up with *two* beautifully functional kitchens—better for testing and for photography. So it was with mixed emotions that we watched the contractors arrive, demolition tools at the ready. We're thrilled about the prospect of new space, but in the mean time, we've needed to find creative ways to keep up with our testing program...using our own houses, a former editor's house, even our publisher's house when she was on vacation (we didn't let her cat out). Since we try to have everyone on the staff at every tasting, we've been taking a lot of road trips in the afternoons.

By next issue, the kitchens should be complete (famous last words?), so we'll include some photos to show you our new workspace.

New in this issue: our first "Three Methods for..." feature (on p. 52), in which we present the signature techniques used by chefs Daniel Boulud, Tom Douglas, and Stephan Pyles to make roast chicken. We're inviting you to try all three over the coming months and then let us know which one you liked best and why. Send us your vote by mail, fax, or e-mail; see the addresses on our masthead (opposite).

Enjoy summer in winter by freezing your pies

I received your latest issue with Carolyn Weil's recipe for Jumble Berry Pie (*Fine Cooking* #46, p. 74). I've made fruit pies for 44 years, but your article has taught me new things I never knew! I'd like to know, however, at what point you recommend freezing the pie. I've always frozen my fruit pies before baking (I like to serve peach and blueberry along with apple during the fall and winter months).

Also, can you substitute margarine for the butter in the crust? (I've always used shortening, as I keep a kosher home and cannot mix milk with meat.)

My daughter gave me a subscription to *Fine Cooking* and I love it! It is the most interesting and informative food magazine I have seen. I made all the pound cake recipes with great success!

—Vivian Marks, via e-mail (Continued)

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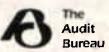
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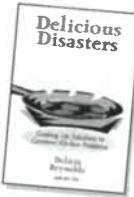


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October 24-25: Senior editor Amy Albert gives demos and hands-on cooking classes at the *Nothing To It! Culinary Center in Reno, Nevada*. For info, call 775/826-2628 or visit www.nothingtoit.com.

October 27-28: *Lake Tahoe, California*, is the setting for an Autumn Food & Wine Festival sponsored by *Fine Cooking*. The two-day celebration includes food and wine seminars and a grand tasting of fine cuisine. On the 27th, senior editor Amy Albert and contributing editor Tim Gaiser conduct a wine and cheese seminar. Details are available at 888/978-2463 or www.mytahoevacation.com/fine.

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Carolyn Weil responds: The best time to freeze fruit pies is after they are completely made and ready for the oven (at the "chill the pie in the refrigerator for 15 to 30 minutes" step). Allow the pie to freeze and then wrap it twice in plastic to prevent freezer burn.

Another way to have summer fruit pie in the winter is by using frozen berries, either ones you've bought in summer and frozen yourself or good-quality commercial frozen berries. I usually taste them and if they're bland, I add a squeeze of lemon juice and a bigger pinch of salt. I do not defrost them, but mix them with the sugar, tapioca, cornstarch, salt, and lemon juice in the recipe and put them in the shell. Cover with a top crust and bake according to the directions in my recipe. The overall baking time will take maybe 15 to 20 minutes longer.

As to using margarine, I don't have much experience baking with it. I'd recommend a stick margarine, one that doesn't have much water added to make it "lite."

You don't know beans about beans

Although I now live in Virginia, I grew up in Gloucester, Massachusetts. When I was young, my Yankee grandmother would bake Boston baked beans every Saturday. At the age of 15, I took over the baking of this truly New England dish. I've now been baking them for over 40 years, and never once have I added anything with tomatoes in it. It is sacrilege! That is why I must take exception to your recipe in FC #45 (p. 40). For true Boston baked beans, you never add even one molecule of tomato anything! I go so far as to not allow anyone eating my beans to put ketchup on them!

As for the rest of your recipe, there are a few problems there also. The piece of salt pork should be cut in half and then the rind scored, not removed. One half goes in the bottom of the pot and the other goes on top. There is no garlic in real Boston Baked Beans. Use dry Coleman's mustard instead of Dijon. Finally, pepper and Worcestershire sauce do not belong. Use molasses, maple syrup, and brown sugar. And, for good measure, add a cored, peeled apple.

This is the second letter like this I've had to write to a national magazine in the past six months. You guys should do more



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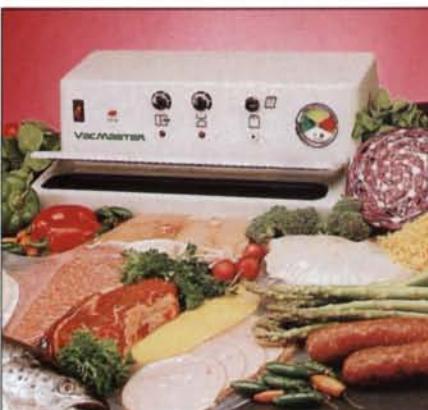
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research. Boston Baked Beans are a sacred Yankee tradition, and you should not mess with the recipe.

—Frank L. Duley, via e-mail

Homesick for tortillas

The article on barbecuing northern Mexico style (Cuisines, FC #46, p. 22) brought back 20-year-old memories.

My husband and I were living in the eastern part of then West Germany in a small village. I was eight months pregnant, and we were both missing our native Tex-Mex cuisine. My mother-in-law sent me her recipe for flour tortillas. They are really very easy to make and taste much better than most store-bought (unless you're in the southwest United States or northern Mexico).

Angie Gorena Chappell's Flour Tortillas

5 cups flour
1 tsp. baking powder
2 tsp. salt
1 cup Crisco
1 cup warm to hot water

Mix dry ingredients, cut in shortening until it feels like cornmeal. (I have used my food processor). Make a "well" in mixture and add hot water.

Blend well until dough holds together. (You might need a little more water if dough is too stiff). Cover dough with a damp cloth and rest for 15 to 30 minutes. Pinch golfball-size balls, knead each one to form a biscuit and then roll out flat (about an 8-inch round).

Cook on medium hot griddle, turning three times: first time—15 seconds (just to seal dough); second time—until done (dough browns slightly); third time—until it "puffs" up or is cooked. Keep moving the tortilla around on the griddle to prevent burned spots if necessary.

The dough can be rolled out ahead of time and stored in the refrigerator between sheets of waxed paper for several days (up to a week).

And by the way, the Chicken Thighs Baked with Lemon, Sage, Rosemary & Thyme (FC #46, p. 38) is a keeper. I have the necessary herbs in my garden, and my family liked it!

—Martha Chappell, Belton, Texas

Why bother boiling lasagna noodles?

In the article concerning lasagna making in FC#44 (p. 34), the author discusses the option of the new no-boil noodles as a way to omit the messy boiling process before assembling the lasagna. For several years, I've been using old-fashioned lasagna noodles of the "need to be boiled" variety, but not boiling them. I layer the dry, uncooked noodles per the recipe and then prior to baking, pour one cup of water around the outside edge of the pan before covering with heavy-duty foil. I usually bake it for one to one and a half hours, and find that the noodles are tender by that time. I thought this method was very common and was surprised it wasn't mentioned at all in the article since it is so much easier than boiling the noodles before assembly, and also has the side benefit of eliminating the cost differential of the no-boil lasagna noodles. Has anyone else tried this method? I confess I have not boiled a lasagna noodle since trying it!

—Beverly Siek, via e-mail ♦



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AT THE MARKET

BY AMY ALBERT



Local apples are worth stopping for

From Oregon to Michigan to Virginia to Connecticut, it's apple season, so take time to stop at a farmstand, inhale, and buy some local varieties. Choose deeply fragrant, hard, taut-skinned fruits with no bruises or blemishes, and, unlike stonefruit, stash them in the fridge when you get home. Farmstand varieties usually need to be consumed shortly after buying, while supermarket apples are better keepers. Apples good for baking will likely be different than those you love eating out of hand; in general, low-acid, high-sugar varieties like the Gala apples pictured here (Braeburn is another sweetie) are better for eating, while tarter varieties (Cortland, Northern Spy, Mutsu, Rhode Island Greening) are especially good for cooking. For great apple dessert ideas, see *Fine Cooking* #41, p. 76.



Firm, glossy Swiss chard

Until recently, red- or white-stemmed chard was mostly what you found in markets, but the beautiful Bright Lights variety (shown above) is now easier to come by. The colors don't make for a huge flavor difference, but do know that those neon-colored stems will stain your cutting board and other ingredients with which they're cooked. The best Swiss chard is found in cold-weather months; look for fresh, glossy bunches. A voluminous 1-pound bunch might look as if it could feed your whole neighborhood, but it will shrink when cooked to feed about four as a side dish.

Chard turns silky when blanched or simmered; it's delicious in stews and gratins. For a simple side dish, slice the leaves into ribbons, dice the stems, and braise both together with olive oil, chopped garlic, a pinch of chili powder, and a little chicken stock, until the stems are tender, about twenty minutes. For a great Swiss chard gratin recipe, see *Fine Cooking* #42, p. 48.



Choose heavy acorn squash

You'll find acorn squash with white-gold, warm orange, or dark green skin, but they all have the same nutty-flavored flesh inside. At the market, choose squash that feel heavy for their size. Like other winter squash, acorn squash are quite high in water content, so those that don't feel heavy probably have been sitting around for a while and are drying up. Although acorn squash is grown year-round, the peak is October through March, when it has been

cold-weather harvested and stored in the cold to develop its sugars.

Acorn squash is so delicious that it doesn't need much fussing with, which is a good thing, because that ridged surface is a real drag to peel. So keep it simple: Halve acorn squash lengthwise, hollow out the seeds, rub the flesh with butter, season with salt and pepper or a sprinkling of brown sugar or maple syrup, and roast, cut side up, until tender.

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READER SERVICE NO. 102

Ripe, crunchy bell peppers

All bell peppers start out green; it's only when fully ripe that they turn red, yellow, or orange, says Renee Shepherd, a gardening cook and specialty seed retailer. "People who claim they don't like peppers have probably only eaten green ones—I think biting into a ripe, crunchy bell pepper is as good as eating an apple," she adds. Look for firm, brightly colored peppers with no soft spots, and pass over soft or withered ones. Though Holland peppers are great looking and uniform in shape, "they won't be as spectacular in flavor as domestic bell peppers that have ripened on the vine," says Bill Neely of Indian Rock Produce.

A mix of red, yellow, and orange bell peppers is delicious in a stir-fry or a *ragoût*, and bell peppers are great, of course, broiled, grilled, or roasted until the skin is blistery and then skinned and tucked into sandwiches or tossed with pasta. One of my favorite ways to use bell peppers (especially when I find them on sale) is to cook up a big batch of the smooth soup at right.



Bell Pepper Soup with Sour Cream & Dill

Red bell peppers will give the brightest color, but yellow or orange ones are just as delicious. *Yields about 5 cups soup; serves four.*

1/4 cup olive oil
4 large bell peppers (2 lb.), stem, ribs, and seeds removed and discarded; flesh diced
1 medium Yukon Gold potato (8 oz.), diced
1 small onion, roughly chopped (to yield 1 cup)
1/2 tsp. salt; more to taste
Generous pinch red pepper flakes
1 1/2 cups simmering chicken stock; more if needed
Sour cream or *crème fraîche* for garnish
4 small sprigs fresh dill

In a Dutch oven or a heavy stockpot, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Add the peppers, potato, onion, salt, and red pepper flakes. Cook, stirring, for a minute or two. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are tender, about 1 hour. Transfer to a blender or food processor and purée in batches, or purée thoroughly with a hand blender. Force the purée through a coarse sieve or a food mill. Transfer to a saucepan and stir in the chicken stock, adding a bit more if you like a thinner soup. Adjust the seasonings. Serve warm or cold, garnished with a dab of sour cream or *crème fraîche* and a sprig of dill.

Honey varies in color and flavor

In places where warm summer weather stretches into the autumn months, bees are still foraging, and beekeepers are extracting the last of this year's honey. If you have a chance, sample some single-flower honeys like those pictured (from left, buckwheat, blueberry, eucalyptus, and fireweed; in front, avocado). They vary strikingly in color and flavor, as opposed to honey from large-scale producers, which is generally blended for consistent color and flavor.

When cooking with honey, it's best stick to recipes that call specifically for honey rather than making a substitution. If you do choose to substitute honey for sugar in baking, be sure to reduce the oven temperature by 25 degrees (to prevent excess browning) and use 1 part honey for every 1 1/4 parts sugar. For every 1 cup honey, reduce the other liquids in the recipe by 1/4 cup and add 1/2 teaspoon baking soda to help neutralize the honey's acidity.

Amy Albert is a senior editor for Fine Cooking ♦



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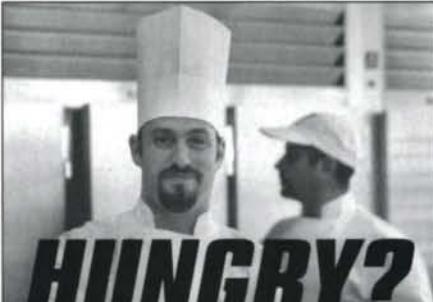
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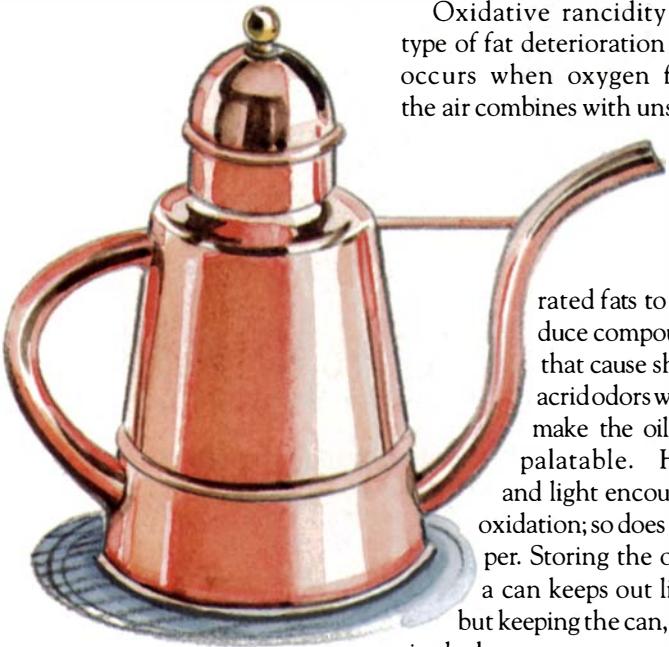
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Q&A

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Don't store oil in copper containers

After weeks of sharing an illness back and forth, my husband and I became suspicious of the copper olive oil can we keep on our counter. There's no stopper in the spout. Could it be harboring harmful bacteria?

—Kay Packer, Harrisburg, PA

Karen Penner replies: From your description, it's doubtful that your illness was caused by the oil in your can, but two concerns come to mind: oxidative rancidity and botulism.

Oxidative rancidity is a type of fat deterioration that occurs when oxygen from the air combines with unsatu-

rated fats to produce compounds that cause sharp, acrid odors which make the oil unpalatable. Heat and light encourage oxidation; so does copper. Storing the oil in a can keeps out light, but keeping the can, particularly a copper can, in a warm kitchen causes the oil to deteriorate quickly. A better bet is a stainless-steel can or a glass bottle that you store in a cool, dark pantry or the fridge when you're not using it. If the can has a lid to keep out extra oxygen, all the better.

If you had been flavoring your oil with raw garlic, then botulism would be an issue. Garlic cloves may carry inactive *Clostridium botulinum* spores from the soil at the time of harvest. To cause illness, the spores must become active.

This requires an anaerobic (oxygen-free) environment and a warm temperature. When garlic is put into oil, it loses contact with oxygen. At room temperature and lacking oxygen, the spores can start to produce an odorless, colorless toxin that, when eaten, may make susceptible individuals ill with botulism, a potentially fatal disease. Therefore, garlic and oil mixtures should be made in small batches, stored in the refrigerator, and eaten within a few days.

Karen P. Penner, Ph.D., is a professor of food science at Kansas State University.

What is drawn butter?

I've seen drawn butter variously defined in cookbooks as either melted clarified butter or melted whole butter. Can drawn butter be either one?

—John Wigent, via e-mail

Molly Stevens replies: Technically, it's neither. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "drawn" is a cooking term dating back to the 15th century that means "extracted" or "strained," so by definition, drawn butter is whole butter that has been melted and then strained or decanted to *draw off* and remove the foam and milk solids. The resulting drawn butter is clearer than plain melted butter, but still retains some of the whole butter flavor. Many cooks add herbs, lemon juice, or other seasonings to drawn butter for use as a sauce, primarily for steamed lobster and other shellfish.

In most modern cooking reference books, the term "drawn butter" has been all but replaced by the more explicit term "clarified butter."

While the terms are now used interchangeably, there is still a slight distinction between the two. Clarified butter takes the process a step further by heating the butter longer to separate out the water (all butter contains some water) as well as all of the solids before straining. Clarified butter has less flavor than drawn butter and is used more as a cooking medium than as a sauce.

Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*.

Substituting self-rising for all-purpose flour

I accidentally bought several bags of self-rising flour. Can I use it in recipes that call for all-purpose flour and baking soda or baking powder?

—Julie Canlis, St. Andrews, Scotland

Belinda Ellis replies: You can use it in recipes that call for baking powder. Self-rising flour, which is popular in the southeastern United States for making biscuits, is simply all-purpose flour with leavening (baking powder) and salt added. Every cup of self-rising flour contains 1½ teaspoons baking powder and ½ teaspoon salt. If your recipe calls for more of either ingredient on a per-cup basis, simply add it to the flour. If your recipe calls for less baking powder than the self-rising flour contains, add all-purpose flour to your self-rising flour in the proper ratio to dilute the concentration of leavening. Baking soda leavens differently than baking powder, so if your recipe calls for soda, you can't use self-rising flour.

Belinda Ellis is the consumer service manager at White Lily Foods, a maker of self-rising flour.

Handling crystallized honey

Why does honey turn to a solid during storage?

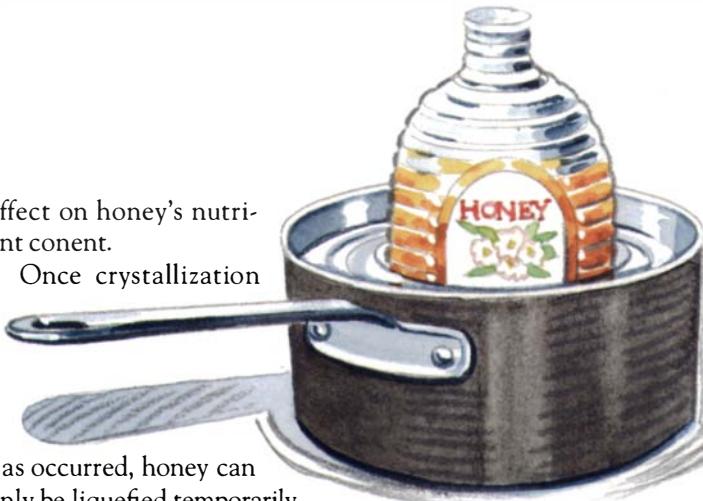
—Melanie Chin,
Ottawa, Ontario

Marcia Cardetti replies: Honey is a "supersaturated" sugar solution, composed mainly of glucose and fructose. During storage, the glucose precipitates (falls out of the solution) and forms crystals, eventually causing the honey to become more solid.

This crystallization of honey occurs naturally over time. Some floral varieties with a bit more fructose than average, like tupelo or sage, are slower to crystallize than others. Crystallization has no

effect on honey's nutrient content.

Once crystallization



has occurred, honey can only be liquefied temporarily and will eventually recrystallize. To dissolve the crystals, take the cap off the jar and put the jar in a warm water bath, or microwave it on high for 2 to 3 minutes, stirring every 30 seconds, until the honey has liquefied. (If the jar is plastic, transfer the honey to a heatproof container first.) *Marcia Cardetti is the director of scientific affairs for the National Honey Board.*

limited air, which prevents destruction of the smoke components. The smoke is collected by showering it with cold water to condense most of the smoke components (any noncondensed vapors are burned

so they're not released into the air). The now-liquid smoke is allowed to settle for two to three days so the tars fall out and can be removed, leaving a clean base product. This base product may then be concentrated, diluted, dried, filtered, treated, or emulsified to make a variety of smoke-flavored products.

Jeff Rozum is the technology development manager at Red Arrow Products, a maker of liquid smoke products. ♦

The facts on liquid smoke

How is liquid smoke made?

—Krista Templeton,
Kill Devil Hills, NC

Jeff Rozum replies: Liquid smoke is made by pyrolyzing sawdust from hardwood trees (which comes from the milling industry, not from tree chipping). Pyrolysis is the controlled burning of sawdust in

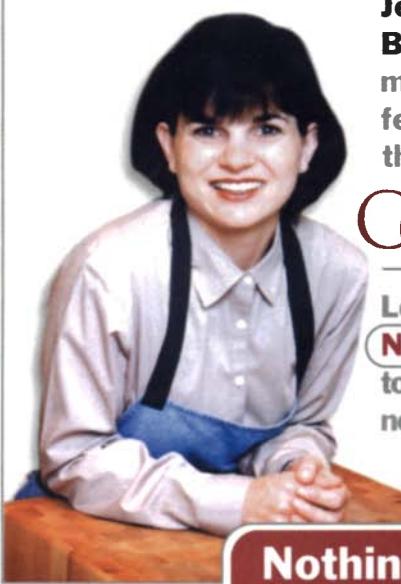
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BY CAROLE WALTER

Shaping layers for the prettiest cakes

The most frustrating problem that bakers struggle with when assembling and frosting a layer cake are domed or uneven cake layers. Applying frosting across an uneven surface or on layers that look like the leaning tower of Pisa is hardly ideal. Fortunately, there are ways to prevent this situation. Here are my tips for baking cake layers that stand strong and proud, ready to be frosted.

Measure your dry ingredients properly

The main reason for wobbly layer cakes is layers that bake into domes. One cause of domes is excessive flour in the batter, which absorbs too much liquid and creates a thicker, heavier batter. (Other

causes include improperly calibrated, overly hot ovens and dark cake pans; see *Food Science*, p. 88, for more on these.)

Too much flour in the batter is usually more a result of improper measuring than a bad recipe. Measuring by weight will give you the most accurate results, but if you need to measure by volume (either because you don't have a scale or because your recipe only gives volume measures), this is the method I recommend: Spoon the flour into dry measuring cups — liquid measures can't give you an accurate reading—and then level the flour by dragging a knife sideways across the top of the measuring cup. Never pack the flour down and never measure by dipping

the cup into the flour. Dipping packs the flour, getting more in the cup, and skewing the balance of dry to wet ingredients in a recipe.

To sift or not to sift?

While the labels on flour bags often state that the flour has been presifted, that sifting took place when the flour was manufactured, and you really have no idea how long ago that was. Flour compacts as it stands, so if you're measuring by volume, I urge you to aerate the flour by straining or sifting it before measuring. If you're measuring by weight and the recipe also calls for a leavener like baking soda or powder, weigh the flour first

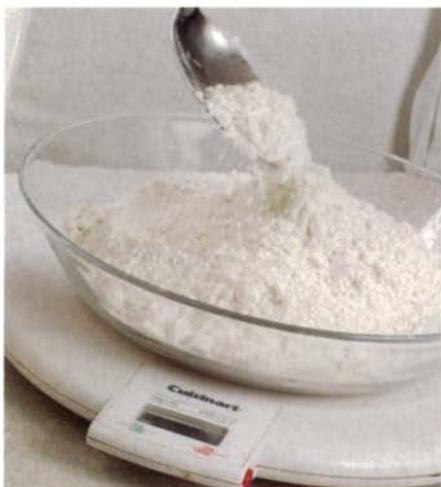
and then sift it with the leavener three times to thoroughly blend the ingredients.

Grease the pan liberally

A properly greased pan allows the cake to rise evenly as it bakes and release easily from the pan after baking. For most layer cake batters, I prefer to use very soft butter (not melted) for greasing pans. The butter coating, which should be very visible, can be applied with a pastry brush or a piece of waxed paper, plastic wrap, or paper towel. Don't flour the pan for creamed butter layer cakes or the surface of the baked cake will harden.

For a truly trouble-free release, I recommend lining the

Level cakes begin with careful measuring and pan preparation



Use a scale if you own one... The most accurate way to measure flour is by weight.



...or measure consistently. If you measure by volume, spoon the flour into the cup and level it with the flat of a knife.



Grease generously. The coating of soft butter in a cake pan should be quite visible.

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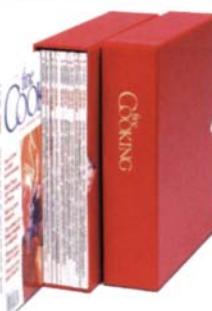
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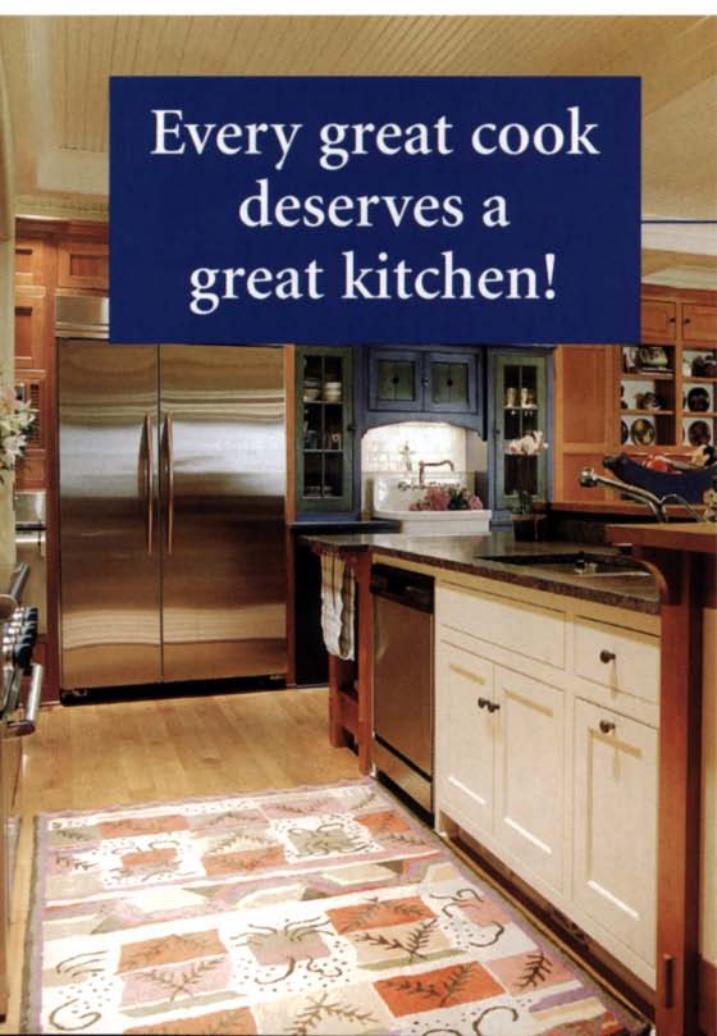


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bottoms of the greased cake pans with parchment circles. These are available in packages of eight-inch disks that are fine to use for eight- or nine-inch layers (see Sources, p. 92). Or, you can make your own disks by tracing the bottom of a layer pan. The parchment, most of which comes treated with silicone these days, usually doesn't need to be buttered.

Weigh your layers to ensure they're even

To get cake layers of even thickness, you need to have an equal amount of batter in the cake pans. The most accurate method to determine this is to weigh the filled pans. If you don't have a kitchen scale, insert a toothpick or the tip of a knife into the batter to see if the height of the batter in each pan is equal.

When dividing the batter among your baking pans, fill them no more than two-thirds full. Spread the batter in a circular motion using the back of an oversize soup-spoon, applying pressure toward the tip while smoothing

the batter across the surface. Don't use a rubber spatula, as it is too awkward for this job.

Cool the layers on round racks with thin wires. Cakes are more apt to stick to racks with wide wires, and damage might occur when it's time to

Because they'll shrink a bit as they cool, they'll release from the pans easier.

Spray the racks with non-stick coating before inverting the layers onto the racks to keep them from sticking. Carefully lift the hot pans

the uneven portion with a long serrated knife.

When you're ready to frost the cake, always choose the tallest and most level layer for the bottom. If the bottom is lopsided, the remaining layers will tilt or slide. For a two-layer cake, start with the bottom layer placed top side down. After applying frosting across the surface, position the top layer right side up so that two level surfaces meet in the middle.

For a three-layer cake, position the bottom and middle layers top side down and the third layer top side up. If the layers are uneven, place the thinner side over the thicker side of the cake beneath.

When a cake layer must be split into multiple layers, always place the crumb or cut side of the layer in the middle, never at the top or bottom. This way, no crumbs are visible on the outside of the cake, and the surface to be frosted will be smooth and even.

Carole Walter is a baking teacher and the author of Great Cakes. ♦

Occasionally, odd-shaped layers result from an oven resting on an uneven floor.

lift them off. Wide wires can also create large indentations on the surface of the cakes when the hot layers are inverted—not a big deal if you're using a thick icing, but they can show through a dusting of confectioners' sugar or a thin glaze. I prefer round racks as opposed to square or rectangular ones, because they make transferring the layers for assembly less awkward.

Let the layers cool in their pans on the wire racks for eight to ten minutes before attempting to turn them out.

from the inverted cakes, peel off the parchment, and let the layers cool thoroughly before frosting them.

Size up your cake before frosting

Before assembling your cake, look at the layers to judge the order in which they're to be placed. If all went well, the layers should be even. Occasionally, though, odd-shaped layers can result from oven racks that aren't level or from an oven resting on an uneven floor. If your layers still aren't flat, level the tops by slicing off

Even amounts of batter equal even layers



Weigh the batter as you fill the cake pans (or check the depth of the batter with a pick) to ensure evenly thick layers.



Smooth the surface of the batter before baking to encourage flat results.



Choose the right racks. Those with thin wires are least likely to damage fragile cakes as they cool.

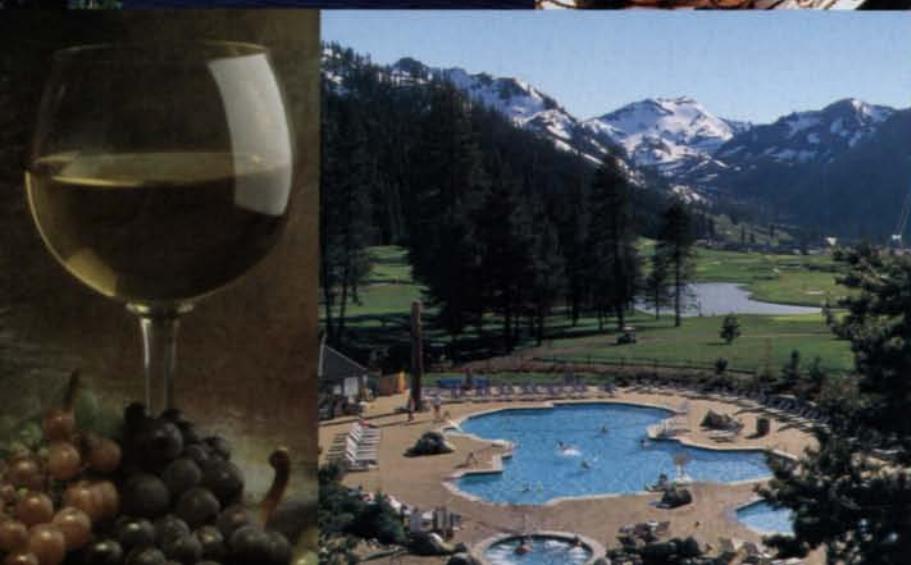
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Pour some fruity, spicy Zinfandel for Thanksgiving

The other night, my friends Virginia and John had me over for a meatloaf dinner. The wine we drank was a soft, fruity Zinfandel, and it was delicious with everything on the plate: meatloaf, roasted sweet potatoes, and soy-glazed broccoli. I bring this up not to brag about Virginia's cooking (stellar), or John's taste in wine (first-rate) but because our humble meal was one of those right-on wine and food matches that you don't forget—and one that you rarely expect of such simple food.

I've always liked Zinfandel, but its marrying so well with such diverse and homespun flavors got me thinking: Could Zinfandel be just the thing for Thanksgiving—a versatile, easy-drinking crowd-pleaser that could accompany the myriad dishes on the menu? I decided to check in with some of my favorite experts.

From berry-like to brawny

But first, a word about Zinfandel, which ranges from light, berry-flavored, and spicy to intense, high-alcohol (often over 15%), and almost port-like. Most of the really intense examples are made from old vines and say so on the label, but an old-vine Zin needn't be a massive one. All the experts I spoke with cautioned that delicious as those big, brawny Zins can be, it's best to stick to light- and medium-bodied

ones (for Thanksgiving, at least) to avoid overwhelming the food—and your guests.

I started with Randall Grahm, owner of Bonny Doon Vineyard, who makes some good Zin himself. "Zinfandel is fruity, exuberant, spicy—it's a great choice for Thanksgiving," he agreed. "Turkey is the Switzerland of the poultry world—it's neutral—and needs those accent marks of fruit and spice, which is one of the things Zinfandel does best." Ridge Lytton Springs is one of his favorites.

"Thanksgiving is a two-wine meal—you need a soft white and a fruity red," says John Ash, culinary director for Fetzer Vineyards and a wine and food teacher. For the red-wine drinkers at your table, "Zinfandel's peppery, black-fruit quality is delicious with anything roasted. And if you're smoke-roasting or barbecuing your turkey, a Zin



Though Zinfandel ranges in style and weight, its hallmark is full-on flavors of berry and spice.

would be amazing," he adds. With roasted turkey, John recommends Zinfandel by Lake Sonoma and De Loach.

Annie Quatrano, chef and owner of Bacchanalia and Float Away Café in Atlanta, also thinks light-style, fruity Zinfandel is great for Thanksgiving. "I love it with sausage and cornbread stuffing, with cranberry sauce, with creamed onions, and with sweet potatoes," she says, "especially if they contain aromatic spices like cinnamon, cloves, or nutmeg." Lolonis and Dry Creek are two of her favorites.

Karen MacNeil, chair of wine programs at the Culinary Institute of America at Grey-stone and author of *The Wine Bible*, agrees. (And being married to a Zinfandel producer,

she has some additional insight.) "Many varietals would have a hard time accompanying such divergent flavors," she says. "There's another factor—texture," she adds, pointing out that a Zinfandel with jammy flavor and soft texture is perfect with Thanksgiving foods, many of which are soft ("Think mashed potatoes"). Karen likes Zin from Beaulieu Vineyards ("a steal at \$13"). And, yes, she recommends Fife Zinfandel, which is made by her husband.

Tim Gaiser, a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*, says that because Zin ranges so widely in price and style, it's wise to find a retailer who can help you get acquainted with individual producers, several of whom make different Zinfandels in different price ranges. Tim's favorites include those by Easton and Seghesio. "Zinfandel is all about lush, ripe fruit; it's everything we love about wine," he says. "All it demands is that you enjoy it."

Zinfandels to seek out

Any of these dozen Zinfandels would be delicious with Thanksgiving dinner. Many producers make several different examples; retail prices are approximate.

Beaulieu Vineyards, \$13

Bonny Doon Vineyard

Cardinal Zin, \$20

De Loach, \$11

Dry Creek Heritage Clone, \$15

Easton Shenandoah

Valley, \$20

Fife Whaler Vineyard, \$20

Lake Sonoma, \$20

Lolonis, \$16

Peirano Estate, \$11

Ravenswood Vintners Blend, \$9

Ridge Lytton Springs, \$23

Seghesio Sonoma, \$17

Amy Albert is a senior editor for Fine Cooking. ♦

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Thailand's proximity to China means both countries share similar culinary roots.

The “Big Four” Flavors of Thailand

Salt, garlic, cilantro root, and Thai white peppercorns—the Big Four, as I like to think of them—are the essence of Thai cooking. The ritual of Thai food preparation invariably begins with pounding these ingredients, sometimes along with other herbs and spices, into a paste. Pounding with a mortar and pestle is the most important technique in Thai cooking because it releases the oils and scents of herbs and spices. The spice paste,

which lasts for a month and can be made ahead in batches, is used to flavor all kinds of dishes, from stir-fries to roasts.

The recipe on the following page for a Thai chicken and vegetable stir-fry makes a great introduction to the Big Four flavors, but don't stop there. Once you become familiar with the Big Four, I encourage you to experiment with these flavors in your own cooking (start with a few of the suggestions on p. 32).

The Big Four ingredients

Salt (glurh)

The dominant flavor of traditional Thai food is saltiness. There are two kinds of salt from Thailand: sea salt, which is intensely salty, and salt mined from the earth, which has a metallic taste. Thai salt is coarser than the table salt with which most people are familiar. If you can't find Thai sea salt, French or Italian sea salt or kosher salt make better substitutes than regular table salt.

Garlic (ka-tiem)

Garlic is highly prized in Thai cooking for its subtle peppery flavor. It's typically added to salt, and it's often used in pounded spice pastes because it helps break down other ingredients and enhances other flavors.

Thai garlic cloves are smaller and more aromatic than garlic grown in other countries, but for our purposes regular garlic cloves are fine. If the garlic is very mature and has started to grow green shoots, remove them before mincing. Always store unused garlic in a basket out of direct light.

Thai white peppercorns (prikk thai)

White peppercorns are mature black peppercorns that have been soaked and then rubbed and ground to remove their outer layers and smooth their surfaces; they're therefore less intense than black peppercorns. After their initial pungency has dissipated, they leave a glowing warm sensation in the mouth.

White peppercorns may be white, yellow, or gray with a few specks of black. Thai white peppercorns are grayish white and more flavorful than other varieties. White peppercorns packed in Thailand also tend to be less expensive than other types, but they need to be picked over before use to remove any debris. If you can't find Thai white peppercorns, regular ones will work as well.

Cilantro roots (rak pakk chee)

The use of cilantro, or fresh coriander, roots was borrowed



from southern Chinese cooking. Today, cilantro roots have all but disappeared from Chinese cooking, but they remain a defining element of Thai cuisine. They're used not so much for their taste, which is bitter and sharp, as for their aroma, which adds a musty, earthy perfume to a dish. Their fibrous texture helps bind the ingredients in a seasoning paste.

In American supermarkets, cilantro isn't usually sold with its roots still attached, though you may occasionally get lucky. To compensate, I've adapted the Big Four Paste to use roasted coriander seeds in combination with cilantro stems to maintain the correct balance of flavors. (Yes, this variation

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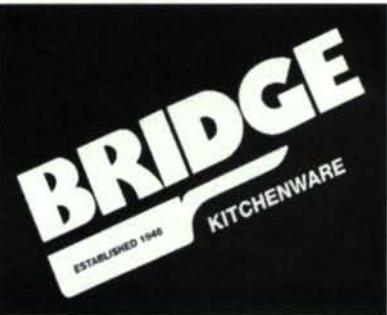
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really turns the Big Four into the Big Five, but who's counting?) If you do find cilantro roots, by all means use them. Clean them first with water and a vegetable brush. Mince them by smashing them with the flat side of a chef's knife or cleaver and then chopping them finely. Unused whole cilantro roots can be wrapped well and frozen for two months, so buy them when you see them.

Experimenting with the Big Four Paste

Grilled foods: For every pound of meat, fish, or shellfish, coat with the juice of 1 lemon, 1 tablespoon olive oil, and 1 teaspoon Big Four Paste. Cover and refrigerate for 1 hour before grilling.

Stir-fried foods: Use 1 tablespoon Big Four Paste for every $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ pound meat, fish, or shellfish, plus 2 to 3 cups sliced vegetables or 2 cups noodles and 1 cup sliced vegetables. Stir the paste into the hot oil in the stir-fry pan just before adding anything else.

Roast chicken or turkey: For a 3-pound chicken, rub the bird with 2 tablespoons olive oil and the juice of 1 lemon, and then rub 1 tablespoon Big Four Paste all over, including under the skin and in the cavity. Seal tightly in a plastic bag and refrigerate overnight. For a 16-pound turkey, use 1 cup olive oil, the juice of 2 lemons, and $\frac{3}{4}$ cup Big Four Paste.

Meatballs and meatloaf: For every pound of ground meat, add 1 tablespoon Big Four Paste along with the other ingredients.

RECIPES

The Big Four Paste

This extremely versatile flavoring paste can be made ahead and refrigerated for up to a month. You can use a mortar, a food processor, or a blender, but the paste made in a machine will be coarser. For a less pungent paste, use 2 teaspoons peppercorns and 1 teaspoon coriander seeds. Yields about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup.

1 Tbs. coriander seeds
2 Tbs. white peppercorns (preferably Thai)
12 to 15 cloves garlic, minced ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup)
1 tsp. coarse sea salt or kosher salt
1 cup minced fresh cilantro stems, roots, or both

Heat a small skillet over medium heat. Add the coriander seeds and toast them, shaking the skillet, until the seeds are aromatic, about 3 min. Pour the seeds into a small bowl to cool. Repeat with the peppercorns. When cool, grind the coriander seeds and peppercorns separately in an electric spice grinder or a mortar and pestle. Finish making the paste in a mortar, a food processor, or a blender.

To finish with a mortar and pestle—Put the garlic and salt in a mortar (set a damp towel under the mortar to keep it from sliding) and pound straight up and down with the pestle until a paste forms. Use a spatula to scrape the garlic from the sides into the center of the mortar as often as necessary. Add the cilantro roots and stems and continue pounding to a fairly smooth paste. Add the ground spices and pound until incorporated. Transfer to a sealed jar and refrigerate.

To finish with a food processor or blender—Pulse the garlic, salt, and cilantro roots and stems in the processor until finely minced, scraping down the sides of the bowl as needed. Add the ground spices and process to a paste. Transfer to a sealed jar and refrigerate.

Stir-Fried Chicken with Green Beans & Mushrooms

Slicing the green beans lengthwise into quarters and blanching them might seem fussy, but it makes a big difference in their texture, so try not to skip this step. Serve this stir-fry with plenty of long-grain white rice, preferably Thai jasmine rice. *Serves two generously.*

6 oz. green beans, ends trimmed, sliced lengthwise into quarters (about 2 cups)
3 Tbs. vegetable oil
1 Tbs. Big Four Paste (see recipe at left)
1 boneless, skinless chicken breast (6 to 8 oz.), sliced thinly against the grain
1 tsp. minced fresh ginger
1 or 2 fresh bird chiles or 1 fresh serrano chile or 1 small fresh jalapeño, minced
2 Tbs. soy sauce
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. sugar
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. sea salt
8 oz. fresh brown or shiitake mushrooms, stems trimmed, caps thinly sliced (to yield about $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups)
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup dry white wine

Bring a medium pot of water to a boil over high heat. Add the quartered green beans and blanch until bright green and still crunchy but no longer raw tasting, about 1 min. Drain, shock in cold water, drain again, and set aside.

Heat the oil in a large skillet or stir-fry pan over high heat for 1 min. Add the Big Four Paste; stir-fry for 30 seconds to distribute the

paste in the oil. Add the chicken and stir constantly until it turns white.

Add the ginger and chiles; stir-fry for 30 seconds. Add the soy sauce, sugar, and sea salt; stir-fry for 30 seconds. Add the green beans and mushrooms. Stir-fry to mix and combine. Add the wine and stir until the chicken is cooked, the beans are slightly soft but crunchy, and the mushrooms are soft, 3 to 5 min. Serve hot.



Resources

Most supermarkets will carry the ingredients you need. If you're fortunate enough to have an Asian market nearby, chances are good that they'll have fresh chiles and cilantro with roots. They might also have Thai white peppercorns and sea salt.

Books

If you want to learn more about the cooking of this region, Su-Mei Yu recommends the following books in addition to her own book:

The Essential Thai Cookbook, by Vatcharin Bhumichitr (Clarkson Potter).

Traditional Recipes of Laos, by Phia Sing (Prospect Books).

Su-Mei Yu is the chef-owner of Saffron restaurant in San Diego and the author of the award-winning cookbook, *Cracking the Coconut: Classic Thai Home Cooking*. ♦

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A flat whisk makes great gravy

When it's time to make the gravy, a flat whisk is the ultimate tool, both for working flour into the pan drippings to make a roux and for working the broth into the roux. Its horizontal shape skims along the bottom and into corners of roasting, sauce, and sauté pans more efficiently than other whisk designs. Cuisipro makes flat whisks with very flexible, silicone-coated wires for gentle use with nonstick surfaces. They come in 6-, 8-, and 10-inch versions (\$9 to \$12) and in a range of colors from Cooking.com and from Sur La Table (800/243-0852 or www.surlatable.com). Or, to find a retailer near you, call 302/326-4802.

—Jennifer Armentrout, assistant editor



Global paring knife is versatile and good-looking

Most cooks I know have a knife that they reach for first and most, one that sees more use than the others. For me, that stalwart is Global's 4-inch

paring knife, which has held front position on my wall-mounted knife magnet for years. Global calls the tool a paring knife, and while it's great for that, this knife does a lot more. Its angled blade and rounded handle are comfortable enough to curl your index finger around and rock-chop as you would with a larger chef's knife. I often cook for one, and I use my Global parer all the time for small jobs like chopping a bit of tarragon, mincing a clove or two of garlic, and

slicing carrots super-thin for weeknight miso soup. What's more, this knife is presentable enough to appear on a cheese tray, where it makes easy work of cutting into hard cheeses like aged Cheddar and Parmesan. I've even used it as a steak knife. For sharpening, Global recommends a fine-grit stone and a gentle touch. The knife is available from Professional Cutlery Direct (800/859-6994 or www.cutlery.com) for \$41.

—Amy Albert, senior editor

Shop with the chefs at Earthy.com

After trying a terrific heirloom dried bean sampler (\$11.50, plus shipping) from Earthy Delights in Michigan, I'm hooked on its web site, www.earthy.com. The colorful beans (adzuki, cannelini, Christmas lima, cranberry, rattlesnake, and Jacob's cattle) came with detailed descriptions and recipe cards for each type of bean. The beans were very fresh (old dried beans can be so dessicated that they never get tender when cooked) and the small (8-ounce) size of each sample was the perfect amount to try in a single recipe. Though all the beans were unique and delicious, the nutty flavor of the Asian adzuki bean (nice in a salad with a fresh ginger-sesame dressing) turned out to be my favorite.

My next order from Earthy.com is the grain sampler (which includes fun things like blue cornmeal and toasted orzo), but it's nice to know the site has more exotic things,

too—the fresh truffles, morels, specialty oils, and baby vegetables are probably what draw top chefs like Charlie Trotter to the site. If you don't have Internet access, call 800/367-4709.

—Susie Middleton, executive editor



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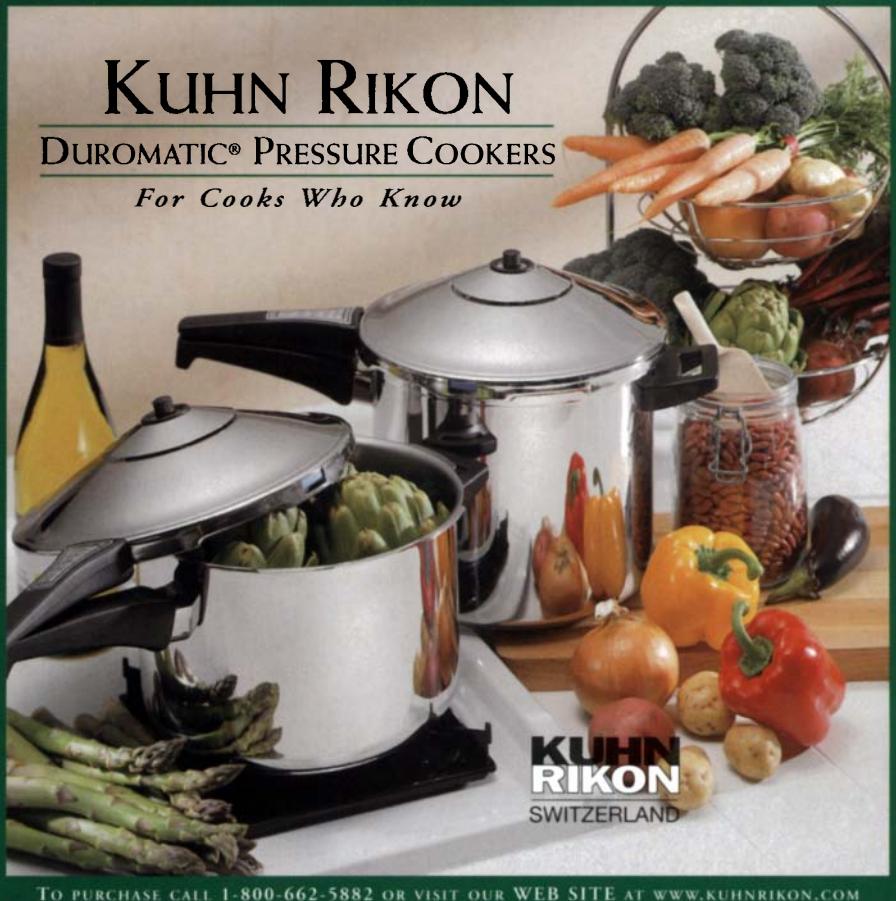
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READER SERVICE NO. 43

Keep food (and wine) fresher longer

I've always wondered, do home vacuum packaging systems really keep food fresher? I recently took one home to find out, using it to suck the air out of the following: bags of meat, fish, stock, and breadcrumbs destined for my freezer; containers of fresh herbs and greens headed for the refrigerator; and half-full bottles of wine.

My conclusions? Yes, air-deprived parsley lasted several days longer than usual (though not three to five times as long, as the manufacturer claims), frozen fish and meat escaped freezer burn, and good wine kept some

nuance into day two. Plus, the system I tried, the Foodsaver, gave me good reason to buy food in bulk: longer and more efficient storage (food sealed in vacuum-packed bags becomes very compact).

A couple of caveats, though. An occasional bag did seem to let in air over time, whether due to a defective seal or a puncture, I don't know. Also, like your toaster, the Foodsaver wants to live on your counter, where you'll see it and use it. So before you buy, ask yourself if you've got two narrow feet of counter space that you're willing to surrender.



The Foodsaver comes in several models; I tested the top-of-the-line Professional II version, which has a handy built-in bag storage and cutter feature, a manual override for stocks and fragile foods, and a few other practical features. These seemed like extras at first, but I now consider them

essential; I wouldn't want a lesser model. Foodsaver machines and accessories are available from major housewares stores nationwide and from Chef's Catalog (www.chefscatalog.com or 800/338-3232). They range from \$120 to \$320, depending on the model.

—Sarah Jay, managing editor ♦



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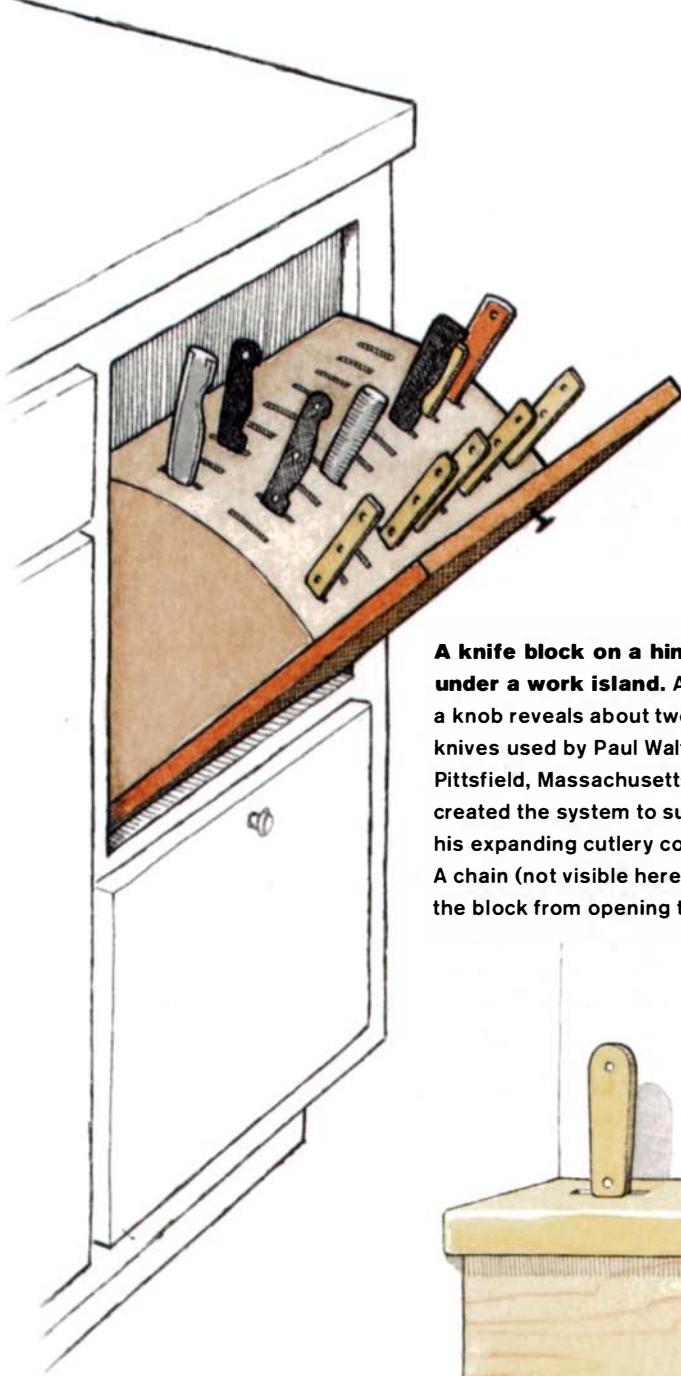
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A knife block on a hinge tucks under a work island. A tug on a knob reveals about two dozen knives used by Paul Walter, of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, who created the system to support his expanding cutlery collection. A chain (not visible here) prevents the block from opening too far.

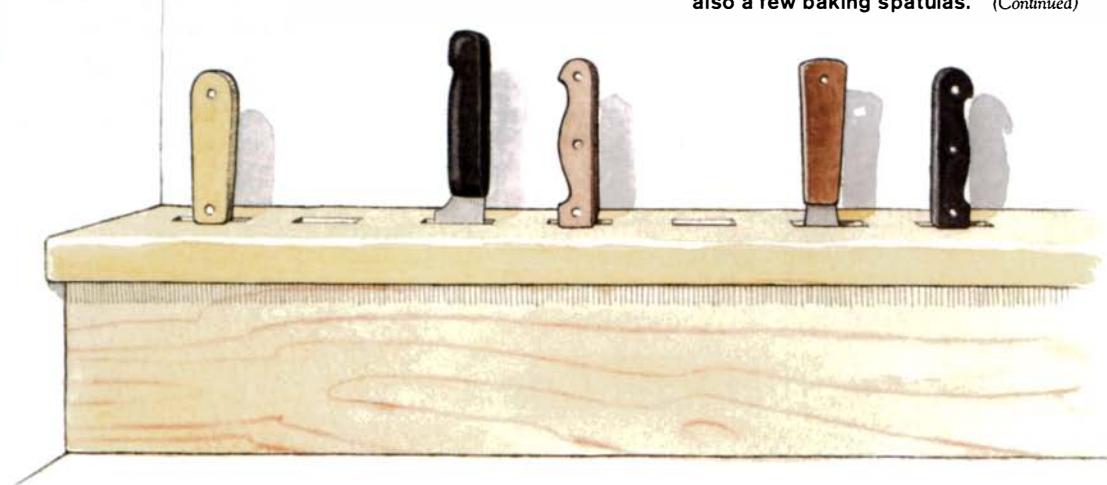
Keeping knives close at hand

Your knives are probably your most-reached-for cooking tool, so it follows that you should store them within arm's length of where you do most of your cutting. In an ideal world, your knife storage system would also 1) be unobtrusive, 2) let you see which knife you're grabbing without having to memorize its handle, 3) hold the blades in place so they don't harm you or each other, and 4) be easy to clean, not only outside but also inside, where the blades are.

None of the most common ways to store knives does the job perfectly. Knife blocks hog counter space, hide the blades, and are impossible to clean. Magnetic strips can be unsafe if the knife is knocked (restaurant-supply stores often carry stronger magnetic strips). Knife drawers are inconvenient when your hands are slick or covered with flour.

The ideas on this page and the next aren't without drawbacks either, but they open up more options and might spark an idea for your kitchen. For information about the manufactured items shown on the next page, see Sources, p. 92.

Dead space becomes useful in an extra-high, extra-wide wooden backsplash in the San Francisco kitchen of Fran Gage, a baker, teacher, and cookbook author. The slots in the backsplash hold Fran's knives and also a few baking spatulas. *(Continued)*



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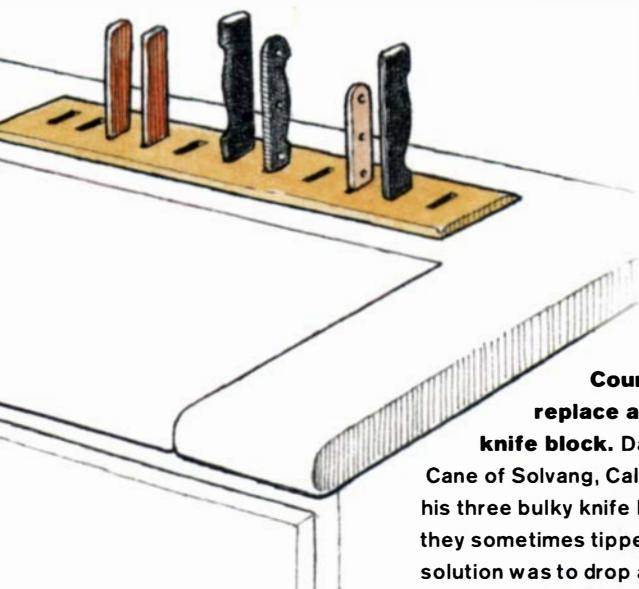
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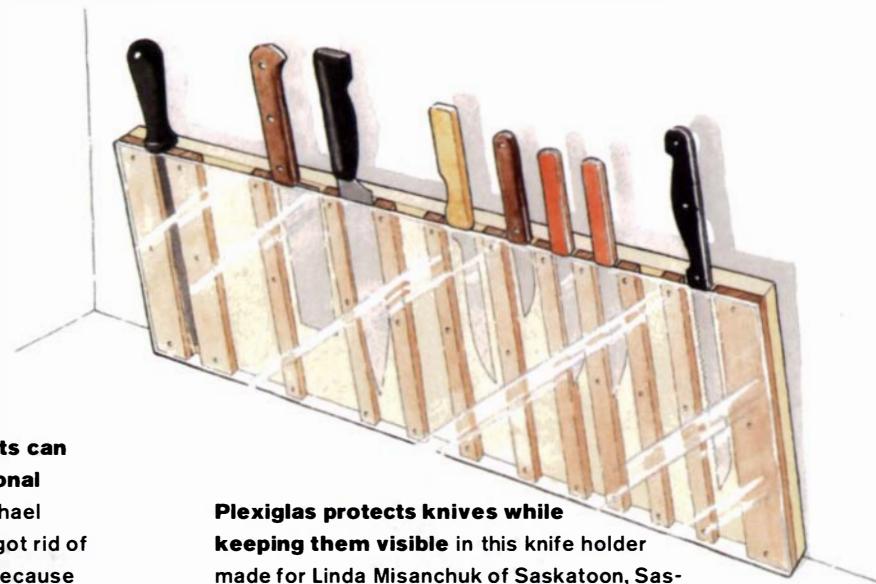
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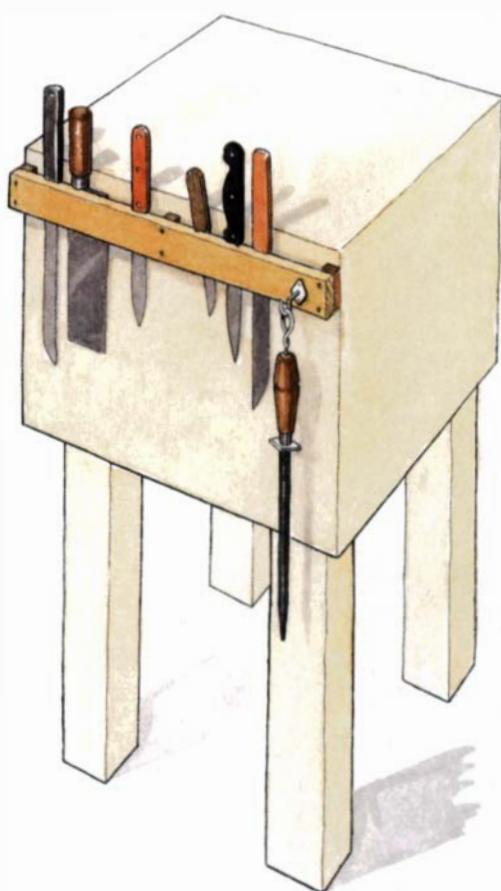


**Counter slots can
replace a traditional**

knife block. David Michael Cane of Solvang, California, got rid of his three bulky knife blocks because they sometimes tipped over. His solution was to drop a custom-made knife block into his granite counter just behind a chopping board.

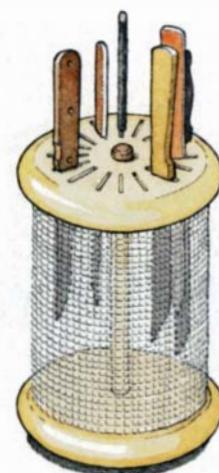


**Plexiglas protects knives while
keeping them visible** in this knife holder made for Linda Misanchuk of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Grooves can be routed in the backboard, or thin wooden strips can be attached to the board to make custom knife slots. The plexiglas is attached with brass screws and can be removed for cleaning. The whole assembly is canted from the wall to make access easier.



A knife rack on the end of a chopping block puts knives right where you want them. This setup in Bruce Aidells and Nancy Oakes's Bay Area kitchen is simply a wood strip attached to the block. Adding a plexiglas shield to the wood would make this safer for homes with young children.

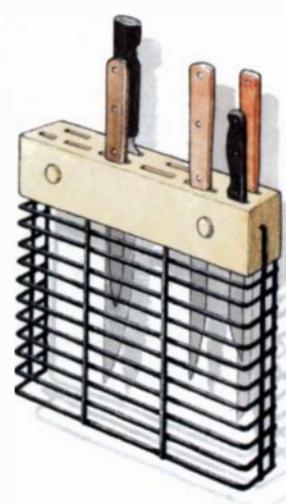
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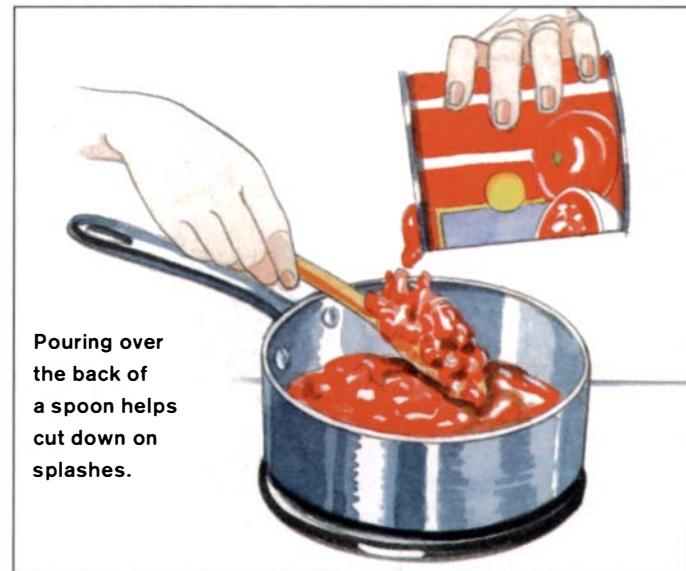
Do you have any cool tricks, improved techniques, or clever ideas that make your cooking more efficient, enjoyable, or delicious?

Write to Tips, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Or send your tip by e-mail to fc@taunton.com. We pay for tips we publish.

A spoon prevents splashing

When transferring stock or soup from one container to another, I minimize splashing by pouring the liquid onto the back of a spoon held over the container to be filled. The liquid follows the spoon and any solids present go with the flow. This works well whether adding to a pot on the stove, to a stand mixer, or to storage containers for leftovers.

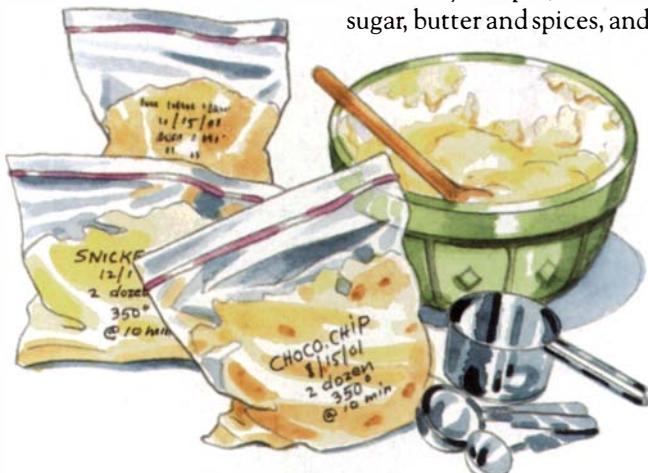
—Charles McEniry,
Stoughton, WI



Pouring over the back of a spoon helps cut down on splashes.

Cookie-dough-mixing marathon

Since I bake many different types of holiday cookies, I've discovered that it's more efficient to make all the mixes and doughs in one day. I pull out all my recipes, flour and sugar, butter and spices, and I



Streamline holiday baking by making several doughs ahead, labeling the batches well, and chilling them for later baking.

make a big mess all at once. I put the prepared cookie doughs and mixes into separate zip-top plastic bags and label them with the following information: date, name of cookie, volume of dough, yield, storage method (freezer or fridge), baking temperature, length of baking time, shape of cookie, decorating method. The kitchen only needs one cleaning after all the mixing, and I can bake

the cookies at my own pace over the following few weeks.

—Regina Padgett,
Strongsville, OH

Quick pan sauces

For convenient saucemaking, I keep a resealable box of a high-quality chicken broth in my refrigerator. After sautéing meat, poultry, or fish, I pour a little broth into the sauté pan and stir over medium heat to deglaze it for a quick, delicious pan sauce. I sometimes add a bit of wine or liqueur to the pan and taste for seasoning. The box of broth will keep for a week or two in the coldest part of the refrigerator.

—Andrea Lord,
Schenectady, NY

Easier, safer microwaving

Instead of using plastic wrap to cover your dish before microwaving, use a very damp (but not soaking) paper towel to cover the dish. It works great on reheated rice. The paper towel doesn't collapse or melt onto the food like plastic wrap, nor does it shrink-wrap itself onto the dish. It lets just enough steam

escape and contributes just enough moisture for the best results. The paper towel also absorbs splatters, and there's no risk of steam burns that can occur while trying to vent plastic. Use a good-quality brand in plain white.

—Susan Asanovic, Wilton, CT

Give wine a rest

From working in the wine industry, I learned that a little planning when buying wine can truly enhance its flavor.

Wine is a living liquid that needs to relax from a shipping journey filled with rapid temperature changes and movements from ship to shore, truck to warehouse, and store shelf to your home. Try this experiment: Buy your favorite inexpensive bottle of wine and let it rest on its side in a cool, dark place for a month and then have a wine tasting that pitches the rested wine against a bottle of the same wine that you've just purchased. The rested wine will taste noticeably better than your newly purchased wine.

—Michael Murphy,
Saint John, New Brunswick

Freeze homemade breadcrumbs

I always have homemade breadcrumbs ready whenever I need them. When I make or buy good bread and don't use it all, I get out my food processor and chop away. I store the breadcrumbs in a heavy-duty zip-top bag in my freezer. When I need some crumbs for a topping or a breading, I just grab them from the bag.

—Mary Napoleone,
Pensacola, FL

Break up dried mushrooms for easier handling

When recipes call for dried mushrooms like shiitakes to be soaked, drained, and then chopped, I break the dried

mushrooms into bite-size pieces first. The mushroom pieces hydrate faster because they're smaller, and I avoid the hassle of trying to slice wet, slippery mushrooms. This method won't yield a pretty julienne of mushrooms, but for many dishes it's fine and quick.

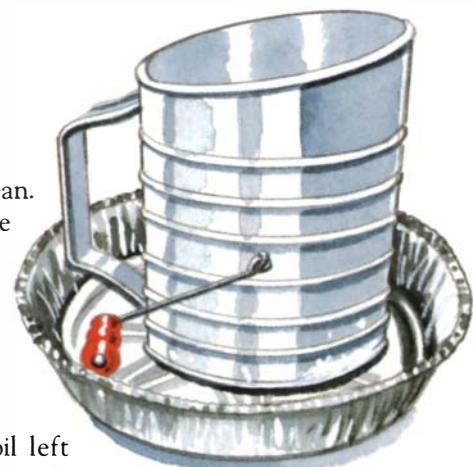
—Ana Weerts,
Brookfield, WI

A baking sheet helps keep the stovetop clean

Last month I finally bought the professional-style, six-burner stove of my dreams. It's twice the size of my old stove, with twice the amount of surface to clean. Now when I cook, I cover the unused burners with baking

sheets to keep them clean. This makes cleaning the stove a breeze.

—Lori Lewis,
New York City



Storing a sifter in a pie pan keeps flour dust contained.

A neat spot for a sifter

I always keep my flour sifter in a disposable round aluminum pan rather than directly on the shelf. The pan keeps the sifter's flour and sugar dust contained so my shelf stays neat and clean.

—Matt Guagliardo,
Kendall Park, NJ ♦

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READER SERVICE NO. 74

Just Sear & Slice for Great Steak Dinners

New York strip steak is the juicy foundation for fajitas, Philly style cheesesteaks, and warm salads

BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE



Photo: Scott Phillips

I've always loved the big steak dinner, but sometimes I just want to satisfy that beef craving without breaking the bank or my diet. So I've been working on a way to get that big, juicy steak flavor in a little more cost-effective and time-saving way. By using what I call the sear-and-slice method, I can turn one nine-ounce New York strip into a flavor-packed dinner that serves two generously. Fajitas, warm salads, and steak sandwiches are just three of my favorite ways to serve sear-and-slice steak (see the recipes starting on p. 46); you can use this method to invent your own steak dinners. The only trick to learn is how *not* to overcook the meat.

Here's how the "sear-and-slice" method works: After searing the steak in a very hot cast-iron pan and transferring it to a cutting board to rest (the



A really hot skillet means a well-seared steak.
The author's favorite skillet is cast iron because it retains heat so well.



After a short rest, slice the steak thinly. It should still be rare on the inside because you'll toss the slices back into the pan for a finishing kick.

steak is still pretty rare), I sauté vegetables in the same pan; then I slice the steak and toss everything together in the same pan to combine the flavors and give the steak a finishing touch of heat. I add a little bread, a few tortillas, or some salad greens, and my sauté is supper.

Buy a great steak—you only need one

Any steak can be seared and sliced for a good dinner, but I like a New York strip best. It's a flavorful, juicy steak with just enough chew in each bite to hold flavor without being tough. Don't confuse this boneless steak with a sirloin steak. A New York strip is the boneless meaty portion of a T-bone steak (the other side of the T-bone is the filet mignon). Sometimes grocery stores like to call a New York strip a boneless shell steak, because a shell steak is really just a New York strip—except that it's still attached to the bone. This backward labeling is just designed to confuse us all, I'm convinced.

While I've made friends with Greg, the butcher at my local gourmet grocery, and I can always count on him to cut some beautiful New York strips for me, I also find that the specialty meat section of my supermarket has some great-looking steaks. The New York strip steaks in this section are nicely marbled and well trimmed. It's important to be choosy about the thickness of the steak—I like mine to be a solid one inch thick. Any thinner and the steak will be overdone by the time it's seared.

My favorite pan for searing is cast iron

My ten-inch cast-iron pan is the perfect size and weight to cook these steak dinners. The heavy cast iron is a great heat conductor—the pan gets really

Sizzling one-pan fajitas: Cook onions, peppers, and garlic in the same skillet as you seared the steak; toss the sliced steak back in (below), and you're ready to roll (far left).



Look for a well-marbled New York strip steak, a good one-inch thick.



hot and holds the heat for even, rapid searing. And ten inches is just the right size for searing one steak; any more room and the oil coating the pan would start to smoke and burn. After the steak is seared, the pan is just big enough to sauté the vegetables. (For more about cast-iron skillets, see the box below.) If you don't have a cast-iron pan, use your heaviest ten-inch skillet (one with straight sides is best).

To sear a steak well, season it generously and add it to a very hot pan with a thin coating of oil. Once you put the oil in the pan and set it over medium-high heat, it will take anywhere from two to four minutes (depending on your cooktop) to get hot. I use a couple of techniques to check the heat. After a minute or two, I hold my hand about three inches above the oil—it should feel really warm. Second, I touch just the tip of the seasoned steak to the oil; if it sizzles and spatters, the pan is ready to go and I proceed with the recipe. If not, I quickly remove the steak and test again in a minute or so. Be careful—the pan and oil can be too hot. If the oil starts to smoke, turn off the flame and slide the pan off the heat. Wait a few minutes and begin again with fresh oil.

Sear the steak—but don't overcook it. For these recipes, I want a well-seared deep golden crust on the steak, but I want to keep the center rare. Traditionally, I'm a medium-rare girl, but for these recipes, I always cook the steak rare, since I'm planning to toss the sliced steak back in the pan later with the vegetables. You'll have no problem getting a golden crust (and keeping the center rare) if your pan is hot enough. Also, once the steak is in the pan, resist the urge to move it around or lift it up until it's time to flip it. Constant contact with the hot oil and pan is essential for the best searing and crust.

A little rest helps redistribute the steak's juices. When you sear a piece of meat, all the juices rush to the outer edges; that's why you'll often hear the suggestion to let your meat "rest"; otherwise, when you cut into the meat, all the juices will spill out immediately. This resting time is perfect for the sear-and-slice recipes below: It gives you just the right amount of time to sauté peppers and onions for the fajitas, or shallots and ginger for the warm salad, or mushrooms and onions for the steak sandwich (and in the same pan, no less). Once the vegetables are sautéed, slice your steak thinly (no chunks, please), toss the slices in the pan, and your juicy steak dinner is ready.

RECIPES

Seared Steak, Pepper & Onion Fajitas

These fajitas are bursting with flavor: Sweet onions and peppers and juicy, spice-rubbed steak get a fresh kick from cilantro, avocado, and tomatoes. To warm the tortillas, stack and wrap them in aluminum foil and put them in a warm oven for 10 to 15 minutes. Serves two.

1/2 tsp. coarse salt; more to taste
Scant 1/4 tsp. freshly ground black pepper; more to taste
Scant 1/4 tsp. ground cumin
Good pinch cayenne
1 Tbs. canola oil
9 oz. New York strip steak, 1 inch thick
1 small yellow bell pepper (or 1/2 small red bell pepper and 1/2 small yellow bell pepper), thinly sliced
1 small yellow onion, halved and thinly sliced
2 tsp. minced fresh jalapeño (cored and seeded first)
1 tsp. minced garlic
2 Tbs. fresh lime juice
3 Tbs. coarsely chopped fresh cilantro leaves

TO SERVE:
Four 8- to 8 1/2-inch flour tortillas, warmed
1 small ripe avocado, peeled and thinly sliced
Sour cream
Chopped fresh tomatoes or jarred salsa
Fresh cilantro sprigs

Combine the salt, pepper, cumin, and cayenne in a small bowl. Rub the steak with the seasoning on both sides. Heat the oil in a 10-inch heavy skillet (prefer-

Caring for cast-iron pans

Not only are cast-iron skillets great conductors of heat, they're also inexpensive and usually easy to find. I bought mine from my local hardware store, but most cookware stores carry them, as do many mail-order catalogs (see Sources, p. 92). Cast iron is slightly porous, so the skillet needs to be seasoned if it's new. This process takes about 20 minutes but once completed, the pan is good to go. To season the pan, use a paper towel to spread a generous

amount of canola oil over the entire interior surface of the skillet. Set the skillet over low heat for about five minutes. Remove the pan and wipe it out with clean paper towels. Repeat this process at least twice. After this initial seasoning, the pan is easy to care for: To clean it, a quick rinse and wipe down is all that's needed (don't put it in the dishwasher, as sitting water will make it rust). Be sure cast iron is completely dry before putting it away.



Melt the cheese right in the pan. Divide the hot steak and mushrooms into two piles, drape on the cheese, cover with foil, and lift onto toasted bread.

ably cast iron) over medium-high heat until very hot but not smoking. Put the steak in the hot pan and sear for 3 min. Turn the steak and cook for another 2 min. (it will be very rare but will cook more later). Take the skillet off the heat, transfer the steak to a cutting board, and cover loosely with foil.

Return the skillet to medium heat. Add the pepper and onion slices and sauté, stirring frequently, until soft, about 8 min. Add the jalapeño and garlic and cook until soft and fragrant, about 1 min. Slide the skillet off the heat and stir in the lime juice, scraping up any browned bits from the pan. Cover to keep warm.

Trim the fat from the side of the steak and cut the steak into thin ($\frac{1}{8}$ - to $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch) slices. Add the slices to the skillet along with any accumulated juices. Toss until well blended. Stir in the chopped cilantro and season with salt and pepper. Serve immediately with warm flour tortillas, sliced avocado, sour cream, chopped tomatoes, and cilantro sprigs.

Philly Style Mushroom Cheesesteak

Melt the cheese right over the warm mushrooms, onions, and sliced steak in the pan by covering the skillet with a lid or foil. If you like the cheese to be browned, run the whole open-faced sandwich under the broiler. *Serves two.*

1 Tbs. canola oil; more if needed
9 oz. New York strip steak, 1 inch thick
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. coarse salt; more to taste
Scant $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. freshly ground black pepper; more to taste
8 medium cremini or button mushrooms (5 to 6 oz. total), thinly sliced



$\frac{1}{2}$ medium yellow onion (2 to 3 oz.), thinly sliced
2 medium scallions (white and green parts), thinly sliced on a sharp angle (about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup)
1 tsp. minced garlic
6 small cherry tomatoes (or grape tomatoes), quartered
2 thin slices provolone or fontina cheese (about 1 oz. each)
2 slices bread (about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick), cut from a round country loaf or other rustic loaf, lightly toasted

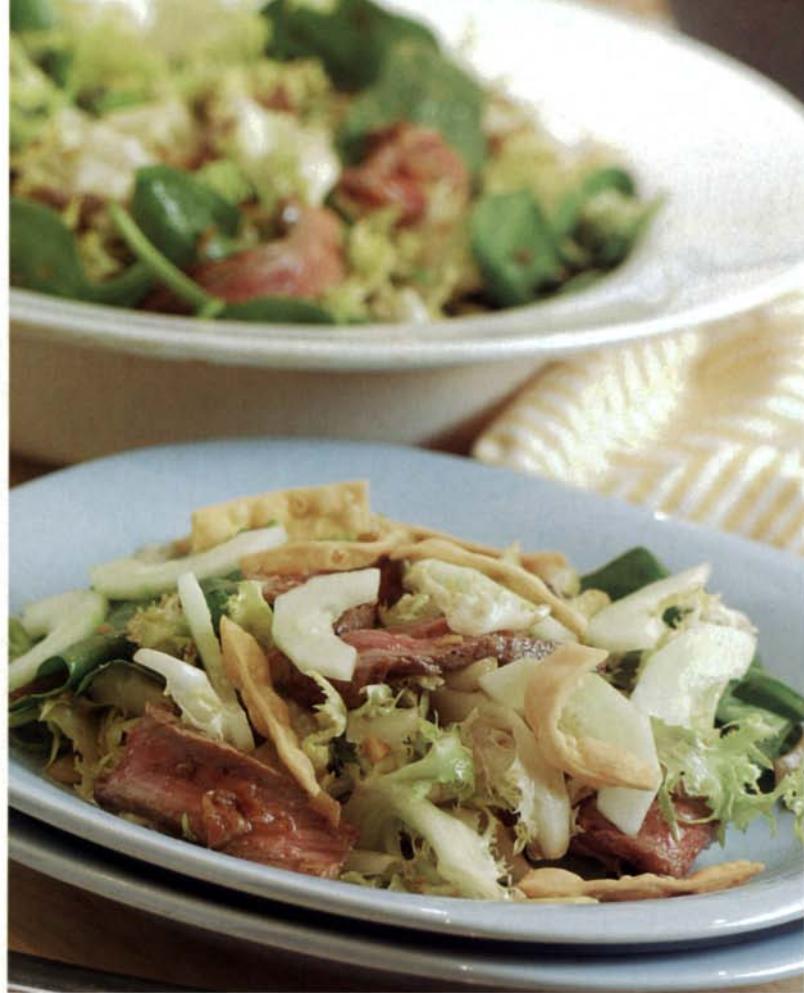
Heat the oil in a 10-inch heavy skillet (preferably cast iron) over medium-high heat until very hot but not smoking. Season the steak on both sides with the salt and pepper. Put the steak in the hot oil and sear for 3 min. Turn the steak and cook for another 2 min. (it will be very rare but will cook more later). Take the skillet off the heat, transfer the steak to a cutting board, and cover loosely with foil.

Return the skillet to medium heat. Add the mushrooms and onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until they're tender and beginning to brown, about 5 min. Add another 1 Tbs. canola oil if the pan seems dry. Add the scallions and garlic and cook until the scallions are limp, about 1 more min. Loosely cover the skillet and slide it off the heat. *(Recipe continues)*

This Philly Style Cheesesteak sandwich is a meal in itself. Serve a little carrot salad or coleslaw on the side, if you like.



Use sturdy greens like frisee for a warm salad;
they'll stand up to the hot dressing and sizzling steak.



Crisp cucumbers and crunchy chow mein noodles add textural interest
to a warm steak salad with a sesame, soy, and ginger dressing.

Trim the fat from the side of the steak and cut the steak into thin ($\frac{1}{8}$ - to $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch) slices. Add the steak slices, any accumulated juices, and the tomatoes to the mushrooms in the pan; season with salt and pepper and toss well. Divide into two loose piles in the skillet. Lay a cheese slice over each pile; cover the skillet to melt the cheese (briefly set the skillet over low heat, if necessary). Slide a large metal spatula under one pile of steak, mushrooms, and cheese and drape it over the toasted bread; repeat with the other pile. Serve immediately.

Warm Ginger Steak Salad

I like to use a mixture of curly, sturdy frisee with some baby spinach for this salad. I find that many mesclun mixes just don't have enough sturdy greens to stand up to the heat of a warm dressing. Serves two.

1 Tbs. peanut or canola oil
9 oz. New York strip steak, 1 inch thick
1/2 tsp. coarse salt; more to taste
Scant 1/4 tsp. freshly ground black pepper; more to taste
2 large shallots, thinly sliced
2 tsp. minced fresh ginger
1 tsp. minced garlic
1/4 cup dry sherry
2 Tbs. soy sauce
2 tsp. toasted sesame oil
8 cups loosely packed salad greens, preferably a mixture of frisee and baby spinach leaves

1/2 small cucumber, peeled, seeded, and thinly sliced
3/4 cup wide chow mein noodles

Heat the oil in a 10-inch heavy skillet (preferably cast iron) over medium-high heat until very hot but not smoking. Season the steak on both sides with the salt and pepper. Put the steak in the hot oil and sear for 3 min. Turn the steak and cook for another 2 to 3 min. for rare or 4 min. for medium rare (keep in mind that the steak will cook more later). Take the skillet off the heat, transfer the steak to a cutting board, and cover loosely with foil.

Return the skillet to medium heat. Add the shallots and cook, stirring frequently, until lightly browned on the edges and slightly frizzled, about 3 min. Add the ginger and garlic and cook until fragrant, about 1 min. Slide the skillet off the heat and let cool slightly. Stir in the sherry, soy sauce, and sesame oil.

Trim the fat from the side of the steak and cut the steak into thin ($\frac{1}{8}$ -inch) slices. Add the steak slices and any accumulated juices to the skillet; season with salt and pepper and stir until well coated. Toss the steak and liquid with the greens until well blended and slightly wilted. Top with the cucumbers and chow mein noodles and serve immediately.

Abigail Johnson Dodge is the test kitchen director of Fine Cooking, as well as a contributing editor. She's the author of Great Fruit Desserts, The Kids Cookbook, and Dessert, which is due out next spring. ♦

French Onion Soup That Warms and Satisfies

Blanketed by melted cheese and crusty bread, this bistro classic can become a home favorite by using chicken broth

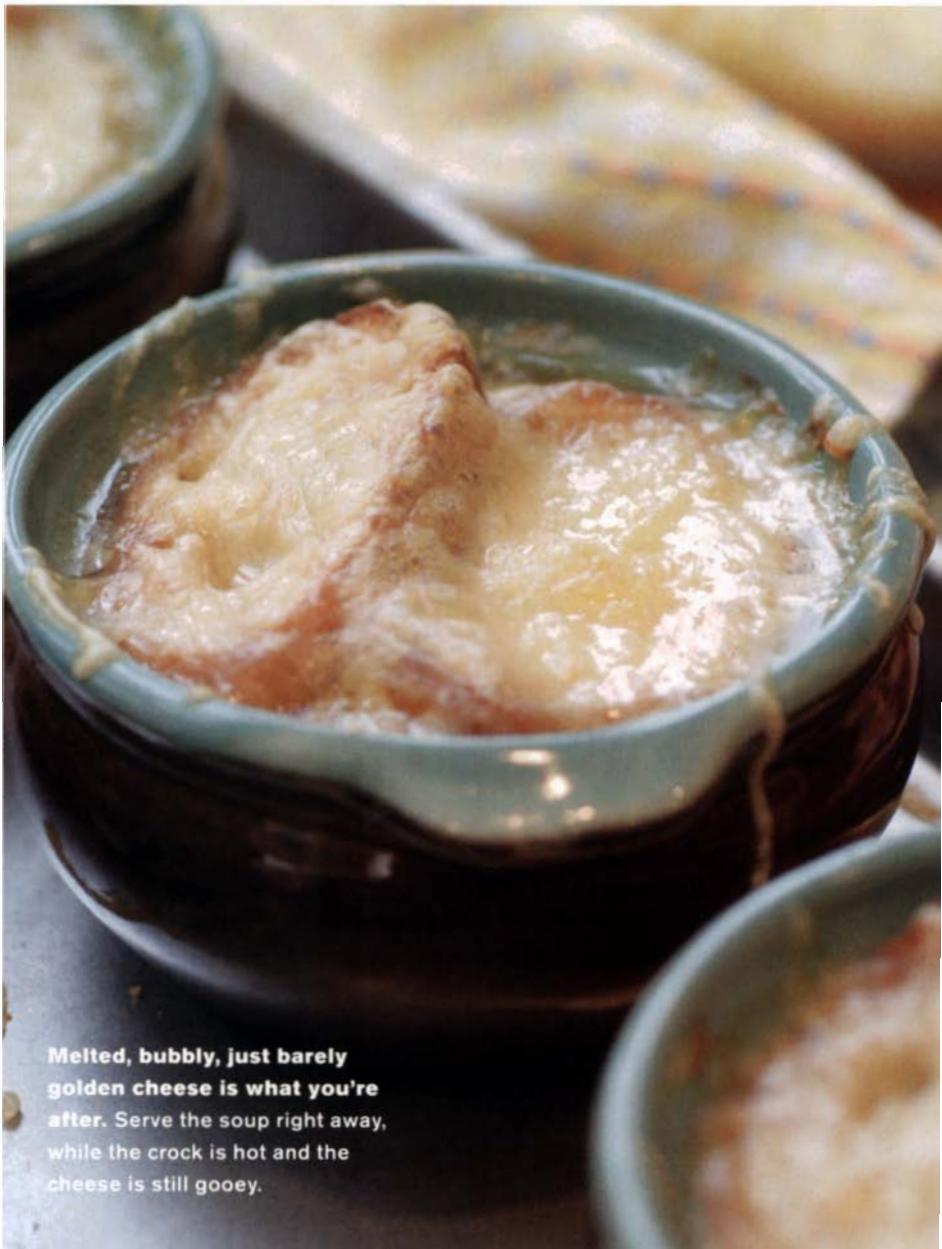
BY MOLLY STEVENS

Whether it's the start of a big meal or a simple supper on its own, a bowl of French onion soup always gives me a little thrill when it arrives at the table. Served in its own special stoneware crock, gratinéed with Gruyère cheese until bubbly and golden, the soup is all the more tantalizing because it's served straight out of the oven, far too hot to eat. I have to sit there patiently (or not), inhaling the heady aroma of sweet onions and savory broth, until I can finally dip into the gooey blanket of cheese and broth-soaked bread for a tiny sip of soup.

For the longest time, French onion soup was a restaurant ritual for me, nothing I would ever bother making at home. But then I inherited my mother's set of onion soup crocks, and I was moved to put them into action. As I began reading recipes, I quickly realized that this classic bistro dish is at its heart a simple peasant soup, and that there are as many versions as there are cooks with a bag of onions and a soup pot.

The recipe that I've developed over the years isn't a carbon copy of one you might get from a French bistro—for one thing, I usually use chicken broth in place of the traditional beef broth, turning a lengthy cooking project into something I can make in about an hour and a half. I also forgo the extra flavorings that many chefs use (Cognac, sherry, or sugar, for example) because I feel that these are too much for this lighter style soup, and sometimes less is more.

My version of onion soup requires no unusual ingredients, and it fills me and anyone I serve it to with a warmth and satisfaction that few soups can match. *(Continued)*



Melted, bubbly, just barely golden cheese is what you're after. Serve the soup right away, while the crock is hot and the cheese is still gooey.



**Slice by hand
or by machine.**

A food processor is speedier, but a knife gives you more control over thickness.

Caramelize onions lightly to coax out sweetness yet keep some toothiness

Choose standard yellow onions—their strong flavor becomes sweet, but not overly sweet, when slow-cooked in butter. Look for the largest onions you can find (often labeled Spanish onions) because large onions mean less peeling. I like to slice the onions by hand because I can better control how thinly they're sliced—they should be about $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch thick. But I can't deny that a food processor with a slicing blade does the job faster, if a little more crudely; just be sure to pick out any stray ends and chunks that the blade missed. A mandoline works, too.

The main trick to cooking the onions is to start out by stewing them slowly in butter; you want to coax out their sweetness without browning them too quickly. Expect this to take 35 to 45 minutes over medium heat, and stay nearby so that you can stir the onions occasionally and lower the heat if they start to brown too quickly.

How much you caramelize your onions depends entirely on personal preference. I like to take them



Barely golden onions. The author goes light on the caramelization to preserve texture. For more flavor, but less toothiness, cook them longer.



A brief simmer turns chicken broth into onion soup. Beef broth may be traditional, but chicken is more convenient.

to a deep straw color. This leaves them with some texture and toothiness, which they'll lose if you cook them down until they're almost jammy. If you prefer a more pronounced caramelized flavor, as some cooks do, simply cook the onions longer or crank up the heat slightly at the end.

Once the onions are done to my liking, I stir in a couple of teaspoons of flour. This small amount doesn't cloud the broth or thicken the soup, but it does add a pleasing touch of velvety viscosity and roundness of flavor—something I miss when making the soup with chicken broth in place of beef broth.

Wine and broth balance the sweetness of the onions. Choose a very dry white wine with little or no oak flavor, such as a Sauvignon Blanc or a Pinot Grigio, to offset the sugars in the onions. You'll add the wine before the broth so it can boil down to evaporate most of the alcohol, lending only its acidity and flavor to the soup.

Traditionally, French onion soup is made with rich, dark beef broth—that's what gives the soup its dark mahogany color and much of its deep, savory flavor.

Unfortunately, few of us have the luxury of time to make real beef broth, and I have yet to find a good store-bought substitute. If you're lucky enough to have a source for good beef broth (or even veal broth), or if you feel like spending a day making your own, by all means use it, but for the rest of us, a homemade or good-quality canned chicken broth (choose one that's low in salt) works perfectly well here.

Toasted bread and melted cheese cap it all off, and elevate a simple onion broth to something both elegant and hearty. I slice a baguette into $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch rounds and use as many as needed to cover the surface of each crock. Denser loaves or thicker slices tend to soak up too much broth, leaving you with a lot of soggy bread and not much soup. Many recipes suggest melting the cheese under the broiler, but I've found that a hot oven does a much better job of melting the cheese to creamy, gooey, bubbly perfection.

If you're really mad about French onion soup, you might want to invest in a set of real onion soup crocks (see Sources, p. 92). The best ones are stout, eight- to ten-ounce ovenproof bowls with a lip that helps support the toasts and cheese. But until you do, use any ovenproof bowls that aren't too shallow.

RECIPE

French Onion Soup

Served with a tartly dressed green salad, this soup is hearty and filling enough for a light supper. I like the convenience of using chicken broth, but if you have a good beef broth on hand, feel free to use it for even deeper flavor. *Yields 9 cups; serves six.*

- 4 Tbs. unsalted butter
- 6 large yellow onions (about $3\frac{1}{4}$ lb. total), sliced about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tsp. all-purpose flour
- 1 cup dry white wine (not oaky), such as Sauvignon Blanc or Pinot Grigio
- 8 cups homemade chicken or beef broth, or low-salt canned chicken broth
- 1 sprig flat-leaf parsley, 1 sprig fresh thyme, and 1 bay leaf tied together with kitchen twine
- 1 baguette, cut into as many $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch slices as needed to cover six soup crocks
- 1½ cups (about 6 oz.) grated Gruyère cheese

In a large, wide soup pot (at least $4\frac{1}{2}$ qt.), melt the butter over medium heat. Add the onions and season lightly with salt and pepper. (It might seem like you have far too many onions, but they'll cook down to about one-quarter of their original volume.) Cook the onions gently, stirring frequently, until they're very soft and have begun to turn a dark straw color, 35 to 45 min.; I like them when they're still a little toothy and haven't yet begun to brown too much.

When the onions are ready, stir in the flour and cook for 3 to 4 min., stirring frequently. Pour in the wine and increase the heat to medium high, stirring and scraping to loosen any caramelized juices, until the



liquid is mostly reduced, 5 to 8 min. Add the broth, toss in the tied herbs, and bring to a simmer. Season to taste with salt and pepper and simmer for 20 to 30 min. to infuse the broth with onion flavor; the onions should be soft but not falling apart. Remove the herb bundle and taste the soup for seasoning. The soup can be made ahead to this point and then cooled and refrigerated for a few days.

To serve—Heat the oven to 350°F, put the baguette slices on a rack, and toast lightly (7 to 10 min.); set aside. Increase the oven temperature to 450°F. Bring the soup back to a simmer. Set six ovenproof soup crocks on a heavy baking sheet and ladle the soup into the crocks. Float a few toasted baguette slices on top, enough to cover the soup surface without too much overlap. Top the bread with a handful (about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup) of the grated Gruyère. Slide the baking sheet into the oven and bake until the cheese is melted and just browning in spots, 10 to 12 min. Serve immediately.

Molly Stevens discovered the restorative powers of French onion soup more than twenty years ago in Paris, when an evening wedding reception devolved into an early morning road trip to *Au Pied de Cochon*, a 24-hour restaurant near *Les Halles* famous for its soupe à l'oignon. She is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*. ♦

Grated Gruyère tops toasted bread. Thin slices from an airy loaf like a baguette keep the soup brothy, not bready.

3 Methods for...

This new *Fine Cooking* feature offers three different takes on one dish. Vote for your favorite by sending us a note by mail, fax, or e-mail; see p. 11 for addresses.

Great Roast Chicken

Choose your favorite approach—seared on the stovetop, rubbed with salt, or butterflied

COMPILED BY SARAH JAY

I was thirteen when I learned how to roast a chicken. Back then, all I did was slide the bird out of the bag, season it, and roast until the heat-sensitive timer popped up. It was about the easiest thing I could imagine, and it tasted just fine.

But if you're like me, you want more than "just fine"—a perfect roast chicken is definitely one of life's great pleasures. To help you get there, we asked three award-winning restaurant chefs how they roast their chickens. Whether you're striving for really juicy meat (even in the breast) or lots of super-crisp skin (even under the thighs), or both, you'll find that one of their methods is for you. Try them all and let us know which one you like best.

Daniel Boulud goes for golden-brown skin and a sweet-and-sour sauce. He trusses the bird with string (using a simple method shown on the opposite page), rubs it with butter, and browns it on all sides in a skillet before roasting. The trussing makes the bird more compact so it's easier to sear, and it also helps with the presentation. "Make sure the roasting pan is the right size," says Daniel. "If it's too deep, steam produced from the chicken will inhibit browning and crispness. If it's too large, the pan

juices might scorch." And you'll need those juices for the sauce, made right in the roasting pan with honey, white wine, and cider vinegar.

Tom Douglas rubs the chicken with salt to ensure really juicy meat. This is a kind of dry-brining technique that adds moisture without the mess and hassle of a salt-water brine. Food scientist Shirley Corriher explains why: The salt rub draws water in the meat out to the skin, where the salt crystals dissolve into a mild brine. Eventually, this brine re-enters the meat, adding moisture just as if the chicken had been soaked in a real brine. "You don't need to rinse the salt off before roasting," says Tom, "but do be careful if you're making gravy from the drippings because it might be too salty."

Stephan Pyles butterflies the bird for faster cooking and to create lots of crisp skin. Before roasting, Stephan cuts away the backbone (easily done with poultry shears), puts the chicken on a baking sheet, and presses it down so it lies flat. This neat trick, combined with a very hot oven (475°F), does three things: it shaves about 20 minutes off the roasting time, it lets *all* the skin get crispy, and it makes carving a cinch.

For a trim, flavorful bird, truss and then sear



Daniel Boulud
is the chef-owner
of Daniel in
New York City.

RECIPE

Daniel Boulud's Sear-Roasted Chicken with Honey-Vinegar Sauce

The overnight refrigeration dries out the skin and helps make it crisper, but you can skip it if you want. Serves two to three.

3½ lb. chicken, rinsed inside and out and patted dry with paper towels, first two wing segments cut off
½ tsp. coarse salt; more as needed
½ Tbs. cracked black pepper, plus more freshly ground black pepper as needed
1 lemon wedge
2 sprigs fresh thyme
1 sprig fresh rosemary
2 cloves garlic
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
2 Tbs. unsalted butter, at room temperature
¾ cup apple-cider vinegar
¾ cup dry white wine
1½ Tbs. honey

Line a pan or plate with several paper towels and put the chicken in it. Refrigerate uncovered for 8 to 24 hours, changing the towels as needed so the chicken stays dry.

Set a rack in the lower part of the oven and heat the oven to 425°F. Rub the chicken cavity with the salt and cracked black pepper, and stuff it with the lemon, thyme, rosemary, and garlic.

Truss the bird as shown in the photo above. The goal is to make the bird compact so it's easier to sear.

In a heavy, 12-inch skillet (I like cast-iron or copper) or a stainless-steel roasting pan, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Rub the chicken all over with the room-temperature butter and season the skin generously with salt and pepper. When the oil is hot, slip in the chicken, breast side up. Sear until the skin is golden brown, about 5 min. Turn the chicken onto one leg and thigh and sear until deep golden brown, about 7 min. (Thighs roast more slowly than breasts, so an extra minute of searing helps compensate.) Tilt the bird onto one side of its breast and sear until golden brown. Brown the other leg, thigh, and breast the same way. Set the chicken breast side up.

Roast the chicken, basting every 10 min. with the pan juices, until the thigh meat is 170°F or the juices run clear, 45 to 50 min. If the chicken browns too quickly, lower the oven temperature to 400°F. Transfer the chicken to a platter and tent with foil while you make the sauce.

Tilt the pan so the juices collect in one corner and spoon off the fat that rises to the top, leaving the juices. Heat the pan on medium high and add the vinegar, wine, and honey. Stir and scrape the bottom of the pan and let the liquid reduce to about ⅓ cup, 8 to 10 min. Taste and season with salt and pepper.



Truss simply. Pass a 4-foot string under the drumsticks' knobs and cross the string over the knobs to make an X. Pull both ends of string down toward the tail and then back along the body, pulling tightly across the joint between the drumstick and thigh and toward the back, catching the wing under the string. Pull the string securely under the backbone at the neck. Knot the ends.



Sear well before roasting. Spend an extra minute browning the thighs to give them a head start on cooking.



Great looks and deep flavor. The browned bits left in the pan become the foundation for a quick pan sauce.



Tom Douglas is the chef-owner of Dahlia Lounge in Seattle.

For extra juiciness, rub with plenty of salt

RECIPE

Tom Douglas's Salt-Rubbed Roast Chicken with Lemon & Thyme

I discovered this technique while on a trip to Germany, which must be why I like to serve it with spaetzle and red cabbage. But it goes with just about anything. *Serves two to three.*

- 3 Tbs. coarse salt**
- 1½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper**
- 2 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme; stems reserved for stuffing the cavity**
- 3½ lb. chicken, excess fat trimmed, rinsed inside and out and patted dry with paper towels**
- 1 lemon, quartered**
- 4 cloves garlic**
- 3 Tbs. unsalted butter, melted**

Mix together the salt, pepper, and chopped thyme. Put the chicken on a rack in a roasting pan and pat the mixture all over the skin. Refrigerate uncovered overnight, or for at least 8 hours.

Heat the oven to 400°F. Put the quartered lemon, garlic, and thyme stems in the cavity of the chicken. Brush the chicken with some of the melted butter. Roast the chicken, basting every 15 to 20 min. first with the melted butter until enough fat has collected in the bottom of the pan to use as basting liquid. The chicken is done when the thigh meat is 170°F or the juices run clear, about 1 hour. Let the chicken rest for 5 to 10 min. and then carve.



A “dry-brine” omits the salt water and the messy soaking. Instead, the chicken gets patted with plenty of coarse salt, plus black pepper and chopped thyme, before heading into the refrigerator overnight.



A cavity stuffed with lemon, thyme, and garlic promises flavorful meat in this roast chicken, while the salt-rubbed skin ensures that it's moist.

Chef photo: courtesy of Tom Douglas

For loads of crisp skin, split and then flatten



Stephan Pyles was the founding chef-owner of Star Canyon in Dallas; Currently, he's teaching and consulting.

RECIPE

Stephan Pyles's Butterflied Roast Chicken with Chile-Cinnamon Rub

Serves two to three.

2 Tbs. olive oil
2 tsp. minced garlic
10 sprigs fresh thyme or 4 sprigs fresh rosemary; more for garnish, if you like
1 tsp. pure chile powder or $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. cayenne
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. ground cinnamon
1 tsp. paprika
1 tsp. ground cumin
1 tsp. ground coriander seeds
1 tsp. coarse salt
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. sugar, preferably granulated brown
3 $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. chicken, rinsed inside and out and patted dry with paper towels

Heat the oven to 475°F.

Pour the olive oil into a small saucepan and add the minced garlic and herbs. Set the pan over high heat until the oil is hot, about 30 seconds. Reduce the heat to low and cook until the garlic has browned slightly, about 3 min. Remove from the heat and let infuse for at least 10 min. or up to 2 hours.

In a small bowl, mix together the spices, salt, and sugar.

Set the chicken on a board, breast side down, and butterfly it as shown in the photos at right.

Set the chicken skin side down in a shallow roasting pan or a jelly roll pan. Brush thoroughly with half of the garlic olive oil (use the herb sprigs as a brush, if you want, before discarding them) and sprinkle with half of the spice rub. Turn the bird over and gently loosen the skin over the breast and thighs. Brush the remaining oil and most of the spice rub directly on the flesh under the skin. Rub the remaining spices on the skin. Pierce the skin with a sharp fork or small paring knife randomly in about 10 places to help it crisp.

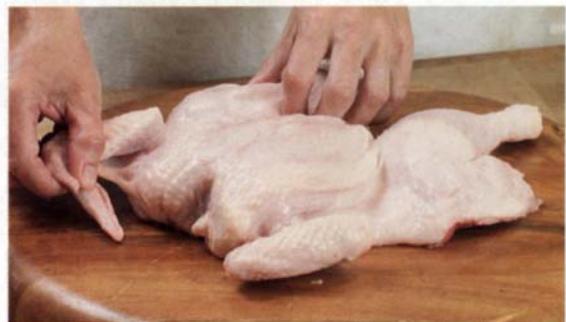
Roast until the skin is nicely browned and the thigh meat is 170°F or the juices run clear, about 40 min. Remove the chicken from the oven, tent with foil, and let rest for 10 min.

To serve, halve the chicken by cutting straight down the center of the breastbone. Carve each half into drumsticks, thighs, wings, and breast, and garnish on a platter with fresh thyme or rosemary, if you like. ♦

Carving a butterflied chicken is a breeze, even for a novice. It's much easier to find the joints when the bird lies flat.



Starting at the neck, remove the narrow backbone by cutting through the ribs on each side with kitchen or poultry shears. Leave the breastbone intact. Flatten the bird and turn it skin side up.



Press on the breast with the heel of your hand so the bird lies flat; you'll need to break the collarbones and some ribs. Tuck the wing tips behind the shoulders.



Five Delicious Ways



They're a natural in Thanksgiving pie, of course, but try sweet potatoes mashed, hashed, roasted, and baked in a gratin

BY KAREN & BEN BARKER

When you think of sweet potatoes, there's a good chance that Thanksgiving and maybe even marshmallows come to mind, right?

Or maybe not. Perhaps you think, as we do, that sweet potatoes deserve better than a once-a-year appearance at Thanksgiving (and a too-sweet topping of marshmallows). Maybe you already know that a sweet potato's mellow, natural sweetness pairs beautifully with salty, oniony, creamy, spicy, buttery, herbal, and yes, sweet flavors.

The pages ahead are filled with our favorite ways to cook sweet potatoes: roasted, puréed, layered in a gratin, sautéed in a breakfast hash, and baked in a pie (a traditional southern dessert that we'll take any day over pumpkin pie). We love these dishes for their full rich flavors and for their ability to take sweet potatoes from holiday to everyday.

Light or dark, the flavor is the same

Sweet potatoes vary considerably in shape, skin tone, and flesh tone. They vary in texture, too, and

are divided into dry-fleshed and moist-fleshed varieties. Dry-fleshed sweet potatoes have lighter tan skins and a slightly mealy texture compared to moist-fleshed ones, whose skins range from copper to purple and which have a somewhat creamier texture. We've found that, ultimately, variations in appearance and texture make little difference in cooking and in flavor. Some say that the deeper the flesh color the sweeter the potato, but we haven't found this to be true.

At the market, look for firm, unblemished sweet potatoes with no soft spots or bruises. At farmers' markets, you'll see varieties with names like Porto Rico, Centennial, Beauregard, and Garnet (also called Garnet Yams, confusingly enough; see the sidebar on p. 58 for the difference between sweet potatoes and yams). Store all sweet potatoes in a cool, well-ventilated spot. They don't keep as well as white potatoes, so use them within a week or two after buying. Never refrigerate them raw, as they'll spoil even more quickly.

(Continued)

with Sweet Potatoes



The sweet potato can take
on many guises. Here, it bakes into a
mellow, creamy Bourbon Sweet Potato Pie.



“Shingle” the slices. For this gratin, arrange the slices so they overlap slightly.

Sweet potatoes brown fairly quickly after cutting, so if you want to peel them ahead of time, submerge the peeled potatoes in water to discourage discoloration, or peel and slice them just prior to cooking.

Try spicy and salty seasonings—but go easy on the sweet ones

As you'll see in the recipes starting below, a sweet potato's full, nutty sweetness is a great match for

Sweet potatoes vs. yams

Cruise the potato section in most produce stores and you'll likely see a sign for yams above coppery-colored, pointy root vegetables. Visit an Hispanic or Asian market and you'll find a decidedly different vegetable—with dark, rough, scaly skin—also labeled as a yam. The truth is that the supermarket yam is not a yam at all, but a type of sweet potato.

The **sweet potato** is grown around the world, although it's indigenous to the Americas and is especially popular in the southern United States. According to the North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission, the naming confusion began decades ago when Louisiana farmers developed a new sweet potato with dark-orange flesh that's moister than the light-skinned, pale-fleshed sweet potatoes. To distinguish this new breed, they called it a yam and the name stuck. Today, the USDA requires that these “yams” (sometimes called American or Louisiana yams) also be correctly labeled as sweet potatoes.

The **true yam** is an unrelated species that's much starchier than the sweet potato and is a staple food for much of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Called *ñame* or *igname*, it can be huge and irregularly shaped. The skin is usually pale to dark brown, and the crisp, dry flesh is white to ivory to yellow. Yams taste rather bland and they aren't sweet. —Molly Stevens



Compact the layers. Before you drizzle on the last of the leek cream, press down to compact the layers of potatoes.

savory flavors as diverse as country ham, cayenne, cilantro, and even bourbon.

But when it comes to sweet ingredients, use a light hand. You've probably noticed that many sweet potato recipes call for large amounts of sweeteners like corn syrup and maple syrup (and yes, marshmallows). We think this is overkill. Sweet potatoes are naturally sweet, so just a little sweetener heightens their flavors nicely—we've included a small amount of honey in the Spicy Roasted Sweet Potatoes and just a touch of molasses in the Mashed Sweet Potatoes (recipes on p. 60). As for marshmallows, we save them for camping trips.

RECIPES

Sweet Potato & Leek Gratin

If you want to prepare the gratin a day ahead, reheat it covered in a 300°F oven until bubbling around the edges and warmed through. Serves six.

- 2 large leeks (1 lb. total), trimmed, halved lengthwise, sliced $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick crosswise, swished and soaked in enough cold water to cover
- 2 Tbs. unsalted butter; more for the pan
- 2 Tbs. olive oil
- 6 oz. pancetta or country ham, cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch dice
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup minced garlic
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 3 Tbs. fresh thyme leaves
- 1 tsp. coarse salt
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 2 medium sweet potatoes (1 lb. total), peeled
- 3 medium Idaho potatoes (1 $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. total), peeled

Lift the leeks gently from their soaking water so that any grit stays behind. Drain them in a colander. In a medium saucepan over medium heat, melt the butter in the olive oil. Add the pancetta or ham and cook, stirring occasionally, until golden, about 9 min. Remove with a slotted spoon to drain on paper towels.



Add the leeks and garlic to the pan, cover, and reduce the heat to low. Sweat the leeks and garlic, cooking slowly and stirring occasionally, until the leeks are softened, about 5 min. (Don't let the leeks or garlic brown.) Add the cream, bring to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer uncovered for 5 min. Stir in the pancetta or ham, the thyme, and the salt; add pepper to taste. Set aside.

Heat the oven to 350°F. Butter a 2-qt. casserole dish. Slice the sweet potatoes between 1/4 and 1/8 inch thick. Repeat with the Idaho potatoes. Arrange one overlapping layer of Idaho slices on the bottom of the casserole. Season lightly with salt and pepper; spoon 2 Tbs. of the leek cream evenly over the potatoes. Add a layer of sweet potato slices, season lightly with salt and pepper, and spoon on another 2 Tbs. of the leek cream. Repeat with the remaining potatoes until all are used. With your hands or a rubber spatula, press down firmly on the potatoes and drizzle the remaining leek cream over them. Bake until the gratin is golden on top, 50 to 60 min. Let rest in a warm place for 15 min. Cut into squares and serve.

Bourbon Sweet Potato Pie

Make the pie a day ahead so the flavors can mellow, and serve it chilled. We love it with softly whipped, lightly sweetened cream. *Yields one 9-inch pie.*

FOR THE CRUST:

6 oz. (1 1/3 cups) all-purpose flour
1 tsp. sugar
Scant 1/2 tsp. salt
2 oz. (4 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into pieces and chilled
2 oz. (4 Tbs.) vegetable shortening, cut into pieces and chilled
1/4 to 1/2 cup cold water

FOR THE FILLING:

2 large or 3 medium sweet potatoes (1 1/2 lb. total)
4 Tbs. butter, melted
1 tsp. vanilla extract
3 large eggs
1 large egg yolk
3/4 cup cream
1/2 cup packed dark brown sugar
1/4 cup bourbon
1/4 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
1/8 tsp. ground cinnamon
1/8 tsp. ground cloves
Pinch freshly ground black pepper

Make the crust—Put the flour, sugar, and salt in a food processor; pulse to combine. Add the butter and shortening; pulse until the mixture resembles coarse cornmeal. Transfer to a mixing bowl. Working quickly, gradually add the cold water, tossing and stirring with a fork until the dough just begins to come

Pairing sweet and savory, a Sweet Potato & Leek Gratin shows how well sweet potatoes go with salty, creamy, and oniony ingredients.



Roasty sweet.
Honey and orange juice give sweet potatoes a delicious glaze.

together. Shape into a disk, wrap in plastic, and chill for several hours or overnight. Heat the oven to 400°F. Roll the dough disk into a 14-inch round that's $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick; ease it into a 9-inch pie pan, trim a $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch border, and crimp an edge crust. Line the shell with foil, fill it with dried beans or pie weights, and bake until just set, 12 to 15 min. Remove the beans and continue cooking until light golden, about 15 min. Let the partially baked pie shell cool.

Make the filling—Raise the oven temperature to 425°F. Pierce the sweet potatoes at each end with a fork and set them on a foil-lined baking sheet. Roast the potatoes until soft, about 1 hour, turning them halfway through. Cool, peel, and force them through a food mill or a coarse-mesh sieve. You should have about 2 cups of purée. Lower the oven to 350°F. Combine the purée with the melted butter, vanilla extract, eggs, yolk, cream, brown sugar, bourbon, salt, nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves, and pepper. Whisk until blended and smooth. Pour the filling into the baked shell and bake until the filling is just set, about 50 min. To test, nudge the rim of the pie plate—the center of the pie should quiver slightly and still be glossy and wet-looking. Let cool and chill thoroughly before serving.



Hand mashing gives a rustic texture to Molasses Mashed Sweet Potatoes...

Spicy Roasted Sweet Potatoes with Orange & Honey

There's just a little bit of spice kick in these simple roasted sweet potatoes. Be sure to choose a baking dish large enough to roast the potatoes in a single layer. *Serves four.*

3 Tbs. unsalted butter; more for the pan
3 Tbs. honey
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup orange juice
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. cayenne
4 medium sweet potatoes (2 lb. total), preferably the same size and shape, peeled, halved crosswise, and quartered lengthwise
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Heat the oven to 400°F. Lightly butter a large Pyrex or ceramic baking dish. In a small saucepan, melt the butter. Whisk in the honey, orange juice, and cayenne. Put the sweet potatoes in the buttered baking dish, add the honey mixture, and toss the slices well to coat them thoroughly. Arrange the sweet potatoes in a single layer; sprinkle with salt and pepper. Roast until the potatoes are browned and tender and the juices are bubbly and thickened, 45 to 55 min. To ensure even roasting, stir and baste several times with the pan juices, doing so more frequently toward the end of roasting. Serve at once.

Molasses Mashed Sweet Potatoes

This mash is a great partner for pork, duck, and all kinds of game; the small amount of molasses really deepens the flavor but doesn't become cloying. We love the way parsnips and carrots complement the sweet potatoes. You can make this up to a day ahead and then reheat it before serving. *Serves four.*

2 medium sweet potatoes (1 lb. total), peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks
4 small carrots ($\frac{1}{2}$ lb. total), peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks



...while a food mill will give a smoother result.
Be sure to dry the vegetables well before milling them.

2 medium parsnips (1/2 lb. total), peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks
Salt
2 Tbs. unsalted butter
2 Tbs. sour cream
2 Tbs. molasses
2 tsp. grated fresh ginger
1/4 cup half-and-half
Freshly ground black pepper

In a large saucepan, combine the sweet potatoes, carrots, and parsnips; cover with cold water. Bring to a boil, add a dash of salt, and simmer until tender, 15 to 20 min. Drain and return to the saucepan. Set the pan over low heat, uncovered, and let the vegetables dry in the pan for about 2 min., shaking the pan occasionally so they don't stick. Pass the vegetables through a food mill or mash them by hand, if you prefer. Stir in the butter, sour cream, molasses, grated ginger, and half-and-half (if you're preparing the potatoes ahead, save 2 Tbs. of the half-and-half for reheating). Add 1/2 tsp. salt and pepper to taste, adjust the seasonings, and serve.

Sweet Potato & Chile Hash with a Fried Egg

In the mayonnaise, we use homemade salsa or the adobo sauce from a can of chiles in adobo. A good store-bought salsa is fine, too, provided it's medium-hot and not too chunky. We like our eggs over easy, but prepare them as you choose. And of course, the hash is great just on its own. *Serves six.*

FOR THE CHILE MAYONNAISE:

1/2 cup mayonnaise
3 Tbs. salsa or adobo sauce
1 Tbs. fresh lime juice
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

FOR THE HASH:

1 lb. sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch cubes
6 Tbs. olive oil; more as needed
1 small onion, diced (to yield 1 cup)
1/2 red bell pepper, diced (to yield 1/2 cup)
2 small fresh poblano or 4 Anaheim chiles (or other medium-hot chiles), cored, seeded, and diced (to yield 3/4 cup)
2 Tbs. minced garlic
1 to 2 jalapeños, cored, seeded, and minced
2 tsp. coarse salt; more to taste
2 Tbs. chopped fresh cilantro
2 tsp. chopped fresh oregano
1 Tbs. fresh lime juice
Freshly ground black pepper
6 eggs
6 sprigs fresh cilantro

Make the chile mayonnaise—In a bowl, combine the mayonnaise, salsa, and lime juice; add the salt and pepper. Whisk until smooth. Taste and adjust the seasonings; set aside.

Make the hash—Cook the diced sweet potatoes in boiling salted water until firm-tender, about 3 min. Drain well and set aside. In a large nonstick skillet, heat 3 Tbs. of the oil over medium heat. Cook the onion, red pepper, and diced chiles, stirring fre-



Fresh chiles and garlic enliven sweet potato hash. A nonstick skillet works best for sautéing the vegetables.

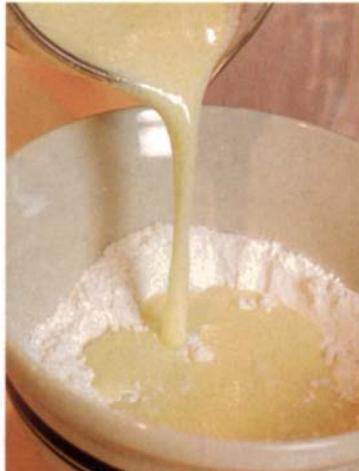
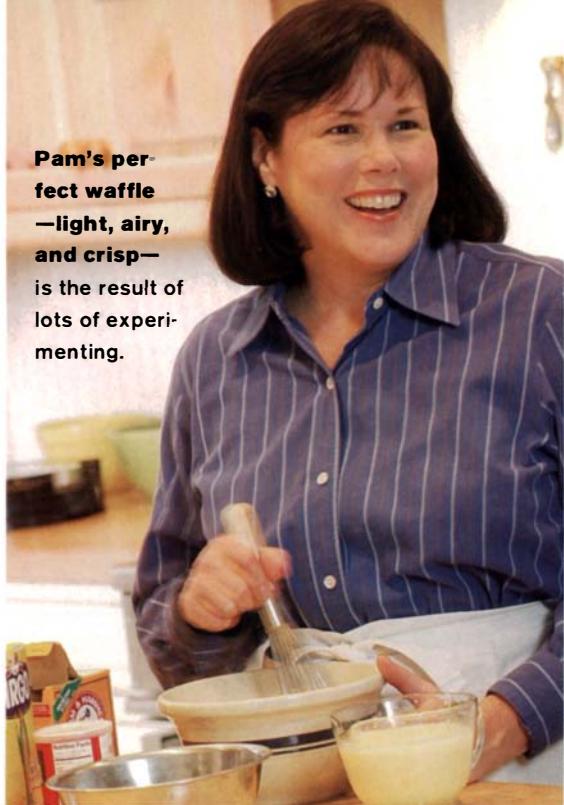


Sweet potatoes for breakfast?
 You bet, when they're diced into a hash and topped with a fried egg.

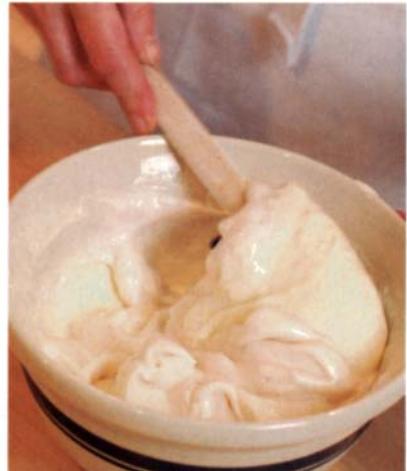
quently, until all are well softened and the onion is golden brown, about 20 min. Stir in the garlic and jalapeños, cook for 1 min. Transfer to a plate. Increase the heat to medium and heat the remaining 3 Tbs. oil in the pan. When the oil is hot, add the sweet potatoes and cook, tossing frequently, until the edges begin to brown, about 10 min. Return the onion and pepper mixture to the pan, cooking until warmed through. Stir in the salt, cilantro, oregano, and lime juice; season with pepper to taste. Transfer to a warmed plate or bowl; cover and keep warm. Add more oil to the pan if needed. When the oil is hot, crack the eggs into the pan (in batches, if necessary) and fry them sunny side up or over easy; the yolks should still be runny. Divide the hash among six plates, top each portion with a fried egg, a dollop of the chile mayo, and a cilantro sprig. Serve at once.

Karen and Ben Barker are the chef-owners of Magnolia Grill in Durham, North Carolina, and the authors of Not Afraid of Flavor: Recipes from Magnolia Grill. ♦

Pam's perfect waffle—light, airy, and crisp—is the result of lots of experimenting.



This waffle batter starts with a traditional method—pour the wet ingredients over the dry, and then whisk until just combined.



But there's a surprising twist.
Reserve the sugar to whip with the egg white separately to create ultra-light waffles.

Finally, A Crisp Waffle

A few twists on a traditional recipe yield light, airy waffles that stay crisp—long enough to serve everyone at the same time

BY PAM ANDERSON

I've owned a waffle iron for years and use it at least twice a month, yet until recently I had never made nor been served a waffle that I thought was as good as it ought to be. I guess I always loved the idea of waffles more than I actually enjoyed eating them. To me, waffles were supposed to be light, airy, and, most of all, crisp. But by the time they got to my plate, they were always damp and limp. Trying to serve them to company was worse. Either everyone was served a decent waffle, one at a time, or everyone ate bad waffles all together. Why couldn't waffles—even when coated with syrup—stay light and crisp to the last bite?

After lots of recipe sampling, I realized the light, crisp waffle recipe I was looking for didn't exist in any cookbook I owned. If I wanted a really crisp waffle, I was going to have to develop it myself. Three days and a vat full of test batter later, I finally pulled my first perfect waffle from the iron.

Cornstarch for crispness, whipped egg whites for lightness and stability

So what's so unique about this waffle recipe? At first glance, the ingredient list isn't all that unusual, but a closer look reveals a few twists. Cornstarch may look a little out of place in a waffle recipe, but its role is key. Coupled with flour, it's this ingredient



that guarantees waffles that are crisp on the outside and tender yet toothsome on the inside.

Some say it doesn't matter whether you separate the egg and whip the white before folding it into the waffle batter. I find, however, that waffles made with a whipped egg white are not only lighter and more airy, they're also taller and more tender. Plus, they brown better. Many waffle recipes contain sugar, but most include it with the dry ingredients. I find that beating it with the egg white accomplishes two things. First, it stabilizes the white, improving the

batter's longevity. Second, the sugar softens the egg white, making it much easier to fold into the batter.

A thinner batter generally results in a crispier waffle. For this reason, I find that liquid fat (e.g., vegetable oil) rather than solid fat (shortening or butter) delivers the crispest waffle. And up to a point, the more fat, the better. For a five-waffle recipe, six tablespoons of vegetable oil is ideal.

Unlike most waffle recipes that call for either milk or buttermilk, this recipe calls for both. Buttermilk waffles are more flavorful, but the batter is thick

These waffles stay crisp, even with a generous helping of syrup (try making your own; see p. 65).

and the waffles less crisp. Waffles made with milk, on the other hand, are more crisp but less flavorful than buttermilk waffles. A combination of the two milks offers the best of both—milk for crisp texture, buttermilk for full flavor.

Vanilla extract, the last unusual ingredient, is my father's suggestion. The extract improves the flavor of the waffle so dramatically that I often eat my waffles plain—no butter or syrup.

Once the waffles are cooked, crisp them further in the oven. The last step I take to guarantee

this waffle's crispness is a required rest directly on the rack of a 200°F oven for five minutes. This allows you to make all the waffles before serving, making it possible for everyone to eat at the same time. The low heat of the oven also beautifully reinforces the waffle's crispness. Don't stack the waffles or within seconds they'll turn moist and limp. But if you forget and accidentally stack them, don't worry. Separate them and arrange them in a single layer again. Almost as quickly as they got soggy, they'll crisp right back up.



Choosing a waffle iron

Pam Anderson's waffles are truly delicious—no matter what waffle iron you use. I know because I ate a lot of them while taking a few irons for a test spin. Here are a few features to look for in a waffle iron.

Classic vs. Belgian

While I did make Pam's waffles quite successfully in a Belgian waffle maker, she developed the recipe with a classic waffler, and we tested it on one. I think a classic waffler produces a thinner, crispier waffle with more little crannies than the deeper Belgian iron, so my testing was limited to this old-fashioned type.

Speed

How long does it take the iron to heat up for the first waffle? More important, how long does it take to cook one waffle? The fastest irons can cook a waffle in under two minutes; the slowest take four to five (which may not sound like a long time, but if you're cooking for six or more

people, you'll be standing around for a while).

Doneness indicators

Make sure the waffler has an easy-to-read light to tell you when the iron is hot and when your waffle is ready. Some people may find whistles and beeps annoying, but my favorite wafflers were those that let me know audibly when to check on the waffle.

Consistency

Some wafflers produce an evenly cooked, nicely golden brown waffle almost every time; others are plagued by hot spots. If you'd like to be able to control the darkness (or lightness) of your waffle, opt for an iron that has a color-control dial.

Size, shape, and material

I prefer a smaller waffler since the waffles are easier to handle. But a large waffler is great for a crowd once you get the hang of spreading the batter evenly. Shape is a matter of preference, but I was converted to the merits of a heart-shaped waffle, as the batter fills it easily and there are (as my waffle-fanatic cousin Lucy points out) more pockets in a heart-shaped waffle to hold more syrup. Be sure the iron has an easy-to-clean nonstick surface (most do).

Four favorites

Based on these criteria, I found four waffle irons I liked, all for different reasons. I'm sure there are classic wafflers out there that I didn't get a chance to test; if I left out your favorite, let me know what it is (and why). For where to buy, see p. 92.

1 The Chef'sChoice WafflePro 830

Taste/Texture Select (\$69) was my favorite. Yes, this waffler is heart-shaped, but if you're not a dainty type, don't worry. You'll be incredibly pleased with the results you get with Pam's recipe in this machine—a very crisp and delicious waffle very quickly. It has a "ready beeper" and color control, as well as a button to choose between a waffle with a "crisp exterior/moist interior," or a slightly longer bake that produces "uniform texture," or crispness throughout.

2 Villaware's Round Classic

Waffler (\$49) also performed well. It's fast and compact, it has a color-control dial, and it whistles at you so there's no excuse for overdone waffles. It produces a crisp, evenly browned waffle.

3 Villaware's American Waffler

with Panini Grill (\$75) is the granddaddy of waffle irons. It's a huge four-square thing that doubles as a griddle. The size is a bit unwieldy, it takes a while to heat up and to cook, and it doesn't let you know when your waffle is ready. But with a little practice (tip: use a rubber spatula to spread the batter evenly), you can make a nice, crisp waffle that easily serves four people in one round.

4 The Toastmaster Cool-Touch

Waffle Baker (around \$12.99), is an amazing value. It produced consistently golden brown, nicely crisp waffles. (There's no color control or beeper; just a readiness light that seemed to indicate the perfect doneness every time). It stands on its side for storage and it's easy to clean.

—Susie Middleton, executive editor

Light, Crisp Waffles

Serve with melted butter and warm maple syrup, or try making your own brown sugar syrup from the recipe below. Yields four or five 8-inch waffles.

3½ oz. (¾ cup) bleached all-purpose flour

1 oz. (¼ cup) cornstarch

½ tsp. salt

½ tsp. baking powder

¼ tsp. baking soda

¾ cup buttermilk

¼ cup milk

6 Tbs. vegetable oil

1 large egg, separated

1 Tbs. sugar

½ tsp. vanilla extract

Heat the oven to 200°F and heat the waffle iron. Mix the flour, cornstarch, salt, baking powder, and baking soda in a medium bowl. Measure the buttermilk, milk, and vegetable oil in a Pyrex measuring cup; mix in the egg yolk and set aside.

In another bowl, beat the egg white almost to soft peaks. Sprinkle in the sugar and continue to beat until the peaks are firm and glossy. Beat in the vanilla.

Pour the buttermilk mixture into the dry ingredients and whisk until just mixed. Drop the whipped egg white onto the batter in dollops and fold in with a spatula until just incorporated.

Pour the batter onto the hot waffle iron (mine takes about ⅔ cup) and cook until the waffle is crisp and nutty brown (follow the manufacturer's instructions for timing at first and then adjust to your liking). Set the waffle directly on the oven rack to keep it warm and crisp. Repeat with the remaining batter, holding the waffles in the oven (don't stack them). When all the waffles are cooked, serve immediately.

Variations

WHOLE-GRAIN WAFFLES

Add ¼ cup wheat germ to the dry ingredients.

CHOCOLATE CHIP WAFFLES

Stir ½ cup coarsely chopped chocolate chips (or ½ cup mini chocolate chips) into the batter.

CORNMEAL WAFFLES

Substitute ½ cup cornmeal for ½ cup of the flour (keep the cornstarch).

CRANBERRY ORANGE WAFFLES

Stir 2 tsp. finely grated orange zest and ½ cup coarsely chopped dried cranberries into the batter.

Brown Sugar Syrup

I've never liked the artificial flavor of most commercial syrups, although I do like the thickness. And while I love the flavor of real maple syrup, I don't care for its thin texture. If you have a little extra time (just a few minutes), you can make your own thick, homemade syrup with delicious flavor. In her cookbook *Heritage of Southern Cooking*, Camille Glenn offers a recipe for homemade syrup that I love and have adapted. It



will keep in the refrigerator for up to a month. Yields scant 2 cups.

1 cup light brown sugar

1 cup sugar

¼ cup light corn syrup

2 cups water

3 Tbs. unsalted butter

¼ cup chopped walnuts, toasted (optional)

In a medium saucepan, bring the sugars, corn syrup, and water to boil. Reduce the heat and simmer vigorously until thickened to a syrupy consistency, 10 to 15 min. Stir in the butter (and nuts, if using). Let cool slightly (it will thicken more as it cools) and serve.

Pam Anderson is the author of *How to Cook Without a Book*. ♦

Try the chocolate chip batter in a heart-shaped waffler for a special dessert or brunch. Serve with a little vanilla ice cream.

Waffle-making tips

♦ Despite nonstick surfaces, you'll still need to grease most waffle irons the first few times you use them. Use vegetable shortening and a pastry brush or cooking spray.

♦ Use wooden or rubber utensils—not metal—to preserve the integrity of nonstick surfaces.

♦ Start with about ½ cup of batter for the smallest irons and ⅔ cup for bigger ones; increase as necessary to fill out waffles.

♦ Don't open the waffle iron prematurely; if your iron doesn't have a beeper or light, check the manufacturer's instructions for minimum cooking times. Also, watch the steam; it will decrease as the waffle cooks.

♦ The first waffle is usually a throwaway; adjust the amount of batter and the color control settings until you get the results you like. —S. M.

Savory, Satisfying

This Farmhouse Ragoût
is chock full of tender
late-summer vegetables.
A garlicky basil purée
provides a punch of flavor.

Vegetable Stews

Get long-simmered flavor in short order with these hearty main-course vegetable *ragoûts*

BY DEBORAH MADISON

What an embarrassment of riches a late-season farmstand offers—an alluring array of gorgeous vegetables begging to be purchased, taken home, and cooked. So, you buy a bagful or more. You sauté or steam some to make a few simple side dishes, you make a soup or two, and maybe you even roast several of them together. But a question I'm often asked is how to combine vegetables into something bigger—something that has more stature than a simple side dish, more heft than a minestrone, and more substance than a stir-fry—and with all the vegetables properly cooked. You'll find one answer in main-dish vegetable stews, or *ragoûts*.

Keep a plan in mind

Ragoût (pronounced ra-GOO) is how the French say "stew," but in my experience with these vegetable dishes, as soon as you say the word *stew*, your friends look at you quizzically and ask, "But where's the meat?" Also, a stew suggests long hours of cooking, and the recipes here are done in an hour or less. So, I like *ragoût*, which to me simply implies several elements united through gentle cooking.

While *ragoûts* are an improvisational type of dish, you can't exactly use a kitchen-sink approach

Make a simple braise by layering vegetables in sequence



After the onion base starts cooking, add carrots.



Add long-cooking potatoes at about the same time.



Cut as you go, and add wax beans next.



Add tomatoes and their juices, cover, and simmer.

when it comes to composing them, either. Here are some pointers to consider when you find yourself wondering what to include in a vegetable *ragoût*.

Limit yourself to about five vegetables, and definitely no more than seven. If there are too many elements, the dish will get muddled. Aim for a balance of flavors, textures, shapes, sizes, and colors, and cut the vegetables into reasonably sized, recognizable pieces, about one to two inches. When cut too large, they'll take longer to cook, and when cut too small, they become indistinct.

Choose vegetables that are in season at the same time. This is one guideline that never fails when it comes to thinking up *ragoût* combinations. In summer and early fall, try shell beans, green beans, zucchini or pattypan squash, and tomatoes, as in the Farmhouse *Ragoût* on p. 70. In fall and early winter, try artichokes, potatoes, shallots, and fennel, as in the Artichoke *Ragoût* with Shallots & Fennel on p. 70; this one is good in the spring,

too, when the first crop of artichokes comes in (at that time, you might use spring leeks in place of fall shallots and chervil instead of rosemary). Spring is also a great time to make a *ragoût* of peas, asparagus, carrots, and spinach. Use your local farmers' market as a source of inspiration from season to season. As always, reach for the freshest vegetables you can find.

When using potatoes, opt for low-starch varieties. If the potatoes are organic, keep the skins on to provide additional color and nutritional value. Low-starch potatoes will hold their shape in the stew better than higher starch varieties like russets. Look for small potatoes like Red Bliss, creamers, or fingerlings, which, depending on their size, need only be halved or quartered (or even left whole if they're about the size of a large marble).

Other starchy ingredients like cooked chickpeas or big, fat dried heirloom beans such as gigantes or runner beans make great additions to a *ragoût*, too.

Slow-cooked flavor in less than an hour.

This hearty *ragoût* of Eggplant with Tomatoes, Peppers & Chickpeas has a rich, satisfying flavor but doesn't take long to cook.



I've found, though, that the best way to ensure that they maintain their shape and don't get mushy is to cook them separately and add them near the end of cooking, allowing enough time for them to meld with the other elements. The broth from the cooked beans can be added to the *ragoût* in case it needs a bit more liquid.

Very few vegetables are wrong for a *ragoût*, but there are a couple that I don't think work so well. Stay away from red beets because they turn everything in the pot red. (Golden beets, on the other hand, are fine.) Sweet potatoes are so starchy that they tend to get mealy in a *ragoût*.

Get a tasty start with an oniony flavor base

When cooking a *ragoût*, it helps to have a bit of a plan in mind and to think in steps. That way, the vegetables will be cooked to the right degree and the stew will have layers of flavor.

First off, start with a reliable base: alliums (shallots, onions, scallions, garlic, leeks, or a combination) sautéed in butter or olive oil. This would also be the time to add hardy herbs like thyme, rosemary, or bay leaf (I'll get to the more delicate ones in a moment), as well as a bit of spice, such as cayenne or red pepper flakes. It's important not to hurry this initial flavor-building step. Give the sautéed ingredients time enough to mingle and take on some color and you'll be rewarded with a tastier *ragoût*.

Once the onions are gently browned, add the longest-cooking vegetables, such as carrots (which generally take longer than anything else, by the way) and other root vegetables. Let them soften and color just a bit in the pan. Then, proceed with the next-to-longest cooking vegetables, and onward (the sequence for the Farmhouse *Ragoût* on p. 70 is a great way to get a sense of how to order things).

After the vegetables have started to soften, add some liquid. It can be vegetable stock, chicken broth, water, a little wine, or even the cooking liquid that you might have saved from other vegetables. If you're using tomatoes, for instance, their juices generally provide enough liquid to enrich your *ragoût*. In these recipes, I've called for just enough liquid to simmer the vegetables. This is so that it combines with the vegetable juices and reduces into a flavorful broth as the *ragoût* cooks.

In the final minutes of cooking, add delicate greens and herbs. Spinach will need just a minute or two. At this point, I like to add tender herbs, such as parsley, chervil, or basil, too. See the sidebar on p. 71 for more ideas on last-minute finishing touches that will add flavor.

Whichever vegetables you choose, a *ragoût* is something you'll want to coddle and hover over, not just walk away from. No two will be the same—and I've never made one I didn't like.

Timing vegetables for best texture

Cooking a stewpot full of vegetables can be tricky. Here are loose guidelines for adding them to a *ragoût* once the onion base is gently browned. Vegetables are listed in descending order; cut them into 1- to 2-inch pieces when appropriate.

Slow	Medium	Fast	Faster
20 to 40 min.	10 to 20 min.	5 to 10 min.	5 min. or less
carrots	artichokes	chickpeas, cooked	spinach
golden beets	Swiss chard	dried or fresh shell beans, cooked	delicate herbs (parsley, chervil, basil, chives, tarragon)
potatoes	bell peppers	fava beans, blanched	
turnips	fennel	green peas	
kale, blanched	asparagus	summer squash	
parsnips	pearl onions		
butternut squash	shallots		
hardy herbs (bay, rosemary, thyme, sage)	string beans		
	tomatoes		

RECIPES

Eggplant Ragoût with Tomatoes, Peppers & Chickpeas

Broiling the eggplant first helps it keep its shape in the stew. Serves four to six.

- 1½ lb. eggplant, preferably plump round fruits
- 2 Tbs. olive oil; more for brushing the eggplant
- 1 large red onion, cut into ½-inch dice
- 1 large bell pepper, red or yellow, cored, seeded, and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 plump cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 2 tsp. paprika
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- Generous pinch cayenne
- 2 Tbs. tomato paste
- 1¼ cups water
- 5 plum tomatoes, peeled, quartered lengthwise, and seeded
- 15-oz. can chickpeas (preferably organic), rinsed and drained
- 1 tsp. salt; more to taste
- ¼ cup coarsely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste

Heat the broiler. Cut the eggplant crosswise into ¾-inch rounds and brush both sides with olive oil. Broil until light gold on each side, about 2 min. per side. Let cool and cut into 1-inch pieces. In a medium Dutch oven, heat the 2 Tbs. olive oil over medium-high heat. Add the onion and bell pepper; sauté until the onion is lightly browned, 12 to 15 min. During the last few minutes of browning, add the garlic, paprika, cumin, and cayenne. Stir in the tomato paste and cook, stirring, for 1 min. Stir in ¼ cup of the water and boil, using a wooden spoon to scrape up the juices from the bottom of the pan. Add the tomatoes, eggplant, chickpeas, remaining 1 cup water and salt. Bring to a boil and then simmer, covered, until the vegetables are quite tender, about 25 min., stirring once or twice. Stir in the parsley, adjust the seasonings, and serve. (More recipes follow)

Artichoke Ragoût with Shallots & Fennel

To prepare fresh baby artichokes, trim them as shown in the photos below. If you can't find baby artichokes, good-quality frozen ones will do. Serves six.

FOR THE RAGOÛT:

- 16 baby artichokes, trimmed and halved, or two 10-oz. packages frozen artichokes, thawed, well drained, and patted dry
- 1 lemon, halved
- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary, plus 1 tsp. chopped
- 2 large sprigs fresh thyme
- 2 bay leaves
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil; more for drizzling
- 3 cloves garlic, slivered
- 8 shallots (root ends intact), peeled and quartered
- 1 fennel bulb, trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 8 small fingerling potatoes (about 1 lb. total), scrubbed and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 Tbs. flour
- 1 tsp. salt; more to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 3/4 cup dry white wine
- 1 1/2 cups vegetable or chicken broth

FOR THE PERSILLADE:

- 3 Tbs. coarsely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 1 large clove garlic
- 1 tsp. grated lemon zest

If using fresh artichokes, rub the cut surfaces with the lemon to prevent browning. Tie the rosemary sprigs, thyme, and bay leaves into a bouquet. In a large Dutch oven, heat the olive oil with the garlic and the herb bouquet over medium-high heat. Add the shallots and fennel. Cook, stirring frequently, until the vegetables are nicely browned, about 10 min. Add the artichokes and potatoes; sprinkle the flour over them and stir well. Cook, stirring, another 5 min., until the vegetables' edges are browned. Add the salt, a bit of ground pepper, and the wine. Simmer vigorously, scraping the browned bits off the bottom of the pan, until the wine is reduced by half. Add the broth, bring to a boil, and cover the pot. Reduce the heat to low and simmer until the vegetables are tender when



A scattering of parsley, lemon zest, and garlic adds aroma and zip to Artichoke Ragoût with Shallots & Fennel.

pierced with a knife, about 40 min., stirring occasionally. Stir in the chopped rosemary. Remove the herb bouquet and adjust the seasonings, if needed.

Prepare the persillade—Chop the parsley and garlic together until finely textured; add the lemon zest. Ladle the ragoût into soup plates, sprinkle some of the persillade onto each plate, and serve.

Farmhouse Ragoût with Pesto

This humble braise more or less cooks itself as you layer on the vegetables. You'll probably end up with a little extra pesto, but it's great on other vegetables, and of course on pasta. Serves four generously.

FOR THE RAGOÛT:

- 3 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 medium onions, cut into large chunks

Trim baby artichokes so they cook to tenderness



Trim the outer leaves by pulling downward so the leaves break off at the base.



Keep pulling until you get to the core of pale green leaves.



Trim the stem with a sharp paring knife.



Shave off rough areas around the base.

Finishing touches boost flavor and bring a *ragoût* together

When that lovely simmering pot of tender vegetables is done, often a finishing touch is just the thing to help unify and juke up flavors.

Chopped parsley and garlic add color and flavor when stirred in or sprinkled on just before serving. Also known as a *persillade*, this chopped

mixture can be varied by adding grated lemon zest, as I've done with the Artichoke *Ragoût* at left. Although parsley is the herb for which a *persillade* is named, you can also use fresh chervil, tarragon, dill, basil, or a mix.

A drizzle of fruity olive oil adds richness

and helps emulsify the liquid into a sauce, as does a pat of sweet butter. I like to stir the butter in just before spooning the *ragoût* into soup plates, while olive oil is especially nice drizzled on each individual dish. For the Farmhouse *Ragoût*, a purée made with basil

and olive oil nicely rounds out the dish. A squeeze of fresh lemon juice or a dash of your favorite vinegar will unify flavors and bring them to the fore. Add it just before serving, because as the acid sits with the vegetables, the colors begin to fade.

7 plump cloves garlic, halved
3 sprigs fresh thyme
6 fresh sage leaves
¾ lb. carrots, scrubbed
¾ lb. small new potatoes, scrubbed
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
½ lb. yellow or green beans (or a mix), ends trimmed, halved crosswise
1 yellow bell pepper, cored, seeded, and cut into 1-inch pieces
1 lb. summer squash, cut into 1-inch rounds
5 plum tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and cut into large chunks
1 lb. fresh shelling beans, husked, or 15-oz. can top-quality white beans, rinsed and drained

FOR THE PESTO:

1 cup packed basil leaves
2 cloves garlic
6 Tbs. olive oil
3 Tbs. water; more or less as needed
Pinch salt
½ cup grated Parmesan cheese, preferably *parmigiano reggiano* (optional)

In a large flameproof casserole or Dutch oven with a snug lid, heat the oil with the bay leaves over low heat. When fragrant, add the onions, 6 of the garlic cloves (if using canned beans instead of fresh, add all 7 cloves), 2 of the thyme sprigs (if using canned beans instead of fresh, add all 3 sprigs), and the sage, stirring to coat everything thoroughly with oil. Cover and cook over low heat as you prepare the rest of the vegetables. Leave very small carrots whole and unpeeled; if using larger ones, peel them and cut them into 2-inch lengths. Add them to the pot. If the potatoes are the size of large marbles, leave them whole, but quarter larger ones or cut fingerlings in half lengthwise. Add the potatoes to the pot in one layer; season with salt and pepper. Add the wax beans, bell peppers, and summer squash to the pot in layers, seasoning each layer with a little salt and pepper as you go. Add the tomatoes, sprinkling their juices over all. Cover and cook over low heat until the vegetables are tender, 40 to 65 min. If tightly covered, the vegetables will produce plenty of flavorful juices. There's no need to stir, but if the pot seems dry, add a few tablespoons of water or dry white wine, if you like.

Make the pesto—In a blender, process the basil and garlic with the oil, adding a little water to loosen if needed. Add the salt and the cheese, if using. Taste and adjust the seasonings if needed.

Cook the shell beans—If you're using fresh shell beans, put them in a saucepan with enough water to total 3 cups, beans included. Add the remaining garlic clove, thyme sprig, and a little olive oil. Simmer uncovered until tender, 30 to 45 min. Season with salt and pepper. Add the beans and their cooking liquid to the pot (if using canned beans, add a bit of water or stock). Ladle into soup plates, drizzle some pesto over each dish, and serve.



Cut off the top ½ inch of the artichoke.



Halve the artichoke and rub all cut surfaces with lemon to prevent browning.

Deborah Madison is the author of the award-winning book, *Vegetarian Cooking for Everyone*; her book on America's farmers' markets is due out in June. She lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico. ♦

Tandoor-Style Flatbreads

A baking stone and a very hot oven are the keys to soft, crusty *naan* bread at home

BY JEFFREY ALFORD
& NAOMI DUGUID

Oven-baked flatbread is the daily bread for millions of people from India to Tunisia, the Himalayas to the Caucasus. Travelling throughout these regions, we've learned to eat bread as the locals in many countries do—wrapped around a kebab, scooped into curry, or even dipped into tea.

Back home in Toronto, we often make fresh-baked flatbreads just for snacking or to accompany any meal. Our children love tearing off a soft, chewy piece just as they would rip into a baguette—no need for knives or supervision. And we love knowing that a stash of flatbread dough in our freezer means we can have fresh bread on the table (and its aroma in the house) on very short notice.

Oven-baked flatbreads are an ideal introduction to the world of breadmaking. Their irregular shapes and textures are part of their appeal, so beginners needn't fear less-than-perfect loaves. They use everyday ingredients and have simple shaping and baking techniques. And you get instant gratification. Because they're



No two flatbreads are alike. The variety in Homestyle Indian Naan is a virtue, not a flaw.

flat, and because they're baked in a very hot oven, flatbreads bake very quickly, in five to ten minutes. They're very rewarding for baker and guests alike.

Turn your oven into a tandoor

The three flatbreads we're introducing here come from very different cultures: Northern India, Central Asia, and Georgia in the Caucasus. They're all traditionally baked on the hot walls of a *tandoor* oven (see the sidebar at right), which gives the breads a crisp bottom crust and a softer top.

To mimic *tandoor* baking in a regular electric or gas oven, you'll need a baking stone or some unglazed quarry tiles (see

Sources, p. 92) placed on an oven rack. The larger the baking surface, the better. The stone or tiles should cover the rack with a one-inch gap around the edge to let hot air circulate.

Kneading develops good texture

You can make flatbreads from almost any leavened wheat flour dough; much of what distinguishes one flatbread from another is the flattening and shaping technique, not the dough itself.

To make the dough, we start with lukewarm liquid, dissolve active dry yeast in it, and then begin adding flour gradually, stirring always in the same direction. This unidirectional stirring helps develop

From Your Own Oven

long strands of gluten. During kneading, these strands get folded over and over to create the complex cell structure of the dough, which then expands and firms up during baking. Good cell structure is important for good texture, whatever the shape (or height) of the final bread.

When you've added about three-quarters of the flour, the dough will become too stiff to stir, at which point you'll turn it out onto a floured work surface to start kneading. A good tip: Wash and dry the dirty bowl *before* you start kneading because, after ten minutes, the dough bits harden and are then difficult to scrub off. Make sure your kneading surface is solid and just below waist high, or whatever height is comfortable.

As you knead, add the remaining flour by keeping your work surface well dusted rather than by adding it directly to the dough. The dough will pick up as much flour as necessary as you knead.

The flour amounts in these recipes are just a guide. The more flour you add, the stiffer the dough and the drier the bread will be. Less flour and the dough will be softer and stickier. A firm dough is easier

to handle than a very soft one, so beginners might want to take that route, but both will make delicious flatbread. Don't worry about getting it exactly right—flatbreads are very forgiving—and just knead until the dough feels smooth and slightly moist, not too sticky.

We like to give our doughs a long, overnight rise at a cooler temperature (below 75°F) rather than a short rise in a warmer place because the slower fermentation produces more flavor. If a quick, two-hour rise suits your schedule, however, that's fine, too.

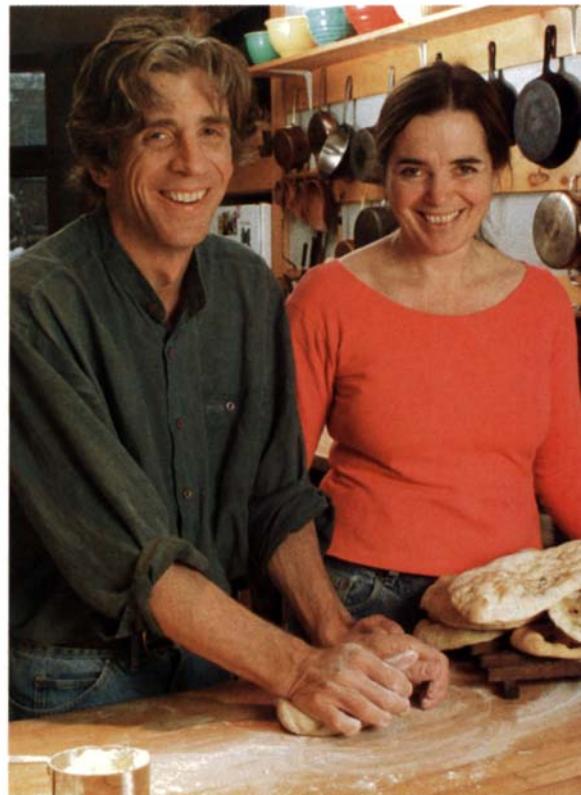
You can make the dough ahead, let it rise, and then keep it refrigerated for a day or two. If you're not ready to bake the breads once the dough has risen, push the dough down, put it in a plastic bag, and tie off the neck, leaving room for expansion. Refrigerated, it will keep for up to three days, though it's easier to handle if baked within the first 24 hours. You can also freeze dough in a sealed plastic bag for up to three months. Doughs stored in the fridge or freezer are often quite wet, so knead briefly on a well-floured surface before cutting and shaping.

What's a tandoor?

You may think of *naan* as the thin, stretchy, slightly oily flatbread served in Indian restaurants, but we've discovered that this particular style of bread is just one of a large family of *naan* made in India, Central Asia, the Middle East, and pockets of Africa. In these regions, the word *naan*, also spelled *nan*, *non*, *nane*, or *none*, refers to any bread baked in a *tandoor* oven.

Made of clay and shaped more or less like a barrel, *tandoors* stand vertically and are usually encased in mud, concrete, or some other supportive, insulating material. The fire—fueled by wood, dung, coal, or gas—burns fiercely at the bottom, heating the clay interior. When the *tandoor* is very hot, the cook dampens the heat, and then slaps the flattened dough against the hot inside

walls of the oven. The hot walls give the bread a firm, well-browned bottom crust while the top bakes to a soft tenderness in the hot air circulating in the oven. When it's done, the cook retrieves it with a hooked metal rod. It always seems like magic. Whenever we hear the *clap and slap* of dough as it's shaped and then slapped onto the *tandoor* wall, we find the rhythm wonderfully spellbinding.



They own a traditional tandoor, but Jeffrey Alford and Naomi Duguid bake flatbreads on a baking stone set in their oven, which gives excellent results.

One or two hours before you plan to bake, remove the dough from the refrigerator and heat the oven. To simulate a *tandoor*, the baking tiles or baking stone must be completely heated, and this will take about twenty minutes beyond the time it takes for the oven to reach its temperature.

Like any kneaded dough made with wheat flour, these doughs are elastic and will initially resist stretching. But if you let the divided pieces rest for ten to twenty minutes, they'll be less resilient.

Once you start flattening a piece of dough, **don't turn it over**. You want to avoid creating a floury surface on the bread. Flour the pieces well before you start shaping and keep the work surface lightly floured; if the dough sticks, detach it with a dough scraper or spatula. When

Stretch Homestyle Indian Naan dough into a teardrop shape



Put one risen ball of dough on a work surface and push it out with your fingertips to a 6- or 7-inch round; don't turn it over. Set it aside; repeat with a second risen ball.



Return to the first piece, pushing it out to a rough 9x7-inch oval; you might try stretching it by draping it over the back of your hands and pulling gently.



Put the oval on a peel and pull on the front edge. Sprinkle on seeds, if using. Transfer to the baking stone and bake as directed in the recipe.

RECIPES

Homestyle Indian Naan

These soft-textured, teardrop-shaped flatbreads, with their golden bottom crust and soft, rippled surface, are easy to make and eat in great quantity. *Yields ten 8-inch breads.*

2 cups lukewarm water (about 100°F)
1 tsp. active dry yeast
1 cup milk
27 oz. (6 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour; more or less as needed
1 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. coarse salt
Vegetable oil for the bowl
3 to 4 Tbs. unsalted butter, melted
Cornmeal or flour for dusting the peel
1 tsp. nigella (black onion) seeds or
1 Tbs. sesame seeds for sprinkling (optional)

To make the dough—Put 1/2 cup of the water in a cup or glass and stir in the yeast. Heat the milk in a small saucepan to lukewarm, about 100°F. Pour the milk and remaining 1 1/2 cups water into a large bowl. Stir in the yeast mixture. Stir in about 2 cups of flour, stirring always in the same direction, until smooth. Stir in the salt and continue stirring in flour, 1/2 cup at a time, until the dough is too stiff to stir but is still soft. Turn out the dough onto a lightly floured surface.

Wash, dry, and lightly oil the bowl. Knead the dough until it's smooth, 4 to 5 min., incorporating only enough flour (by keeping the work surface dusted) to prevent the dough from sticking; the dough should be quite soft and not tight.

Put the dough in the bowl, cover with plastic, and let it rise in a cool place for 8 hours or overnight. If you're not ready to bake yet, punch down the dough, put it

in a plastic bag, and refrigerate it for up to 3 days.

To shape and bake—About 1 1/4 hours before you want to serve the breads, set an oven rack to an upper-middle rung. Put a large baking stone or unglazed quarry tiles on the rack, leaving a 1-inch gap around the border. Heat the oven to 500°F.

Pull the dough away from the sides of the bowl and transfer it to a lightly floured surface. Cut the dough in half, putting half of it back in the bowl (covered) while you work with the other half.

Cut the dough half into five equal pieces. Shape each one into a ball by rolling the dough on the counter or by using both hands to turn it, round it, and smooth it. Put the balls to the side or back of the counter (flour the surface), and brush each with melted butter. Cover with plastic and let rest for 20 min. During the last few minutes of resting, prepare the remaining dough the same way.

Dust a rimless baking sheet or peel lightly with cornmeal or flour and follow the shaping photos above. Transfer the flatbread to the baking stone. Finish shaping the second round, sprinkling with seeds, if using. Bake it alongside the first. Meanwhile, prepare the next three risen balls of dough the same way.

Bake the breads until their rippled tops have light golden spots and the bottoms are golden, 5 to 6 min. Remove them with a peel or long-handled spatula, transfer to a rack to cool for about 5 min., and brush with more melted butter, if you like. Wrap them in a cotton cloth. Bake the next three breads and wrap them in a cloth to stay soft and warm while you shape and bake the last five balls.

using a rolling pin, roll lightly from the center out, giving the dough a quarter turn after each stroke to make an even round and keep the bread from sticking.

Bake in batches and eat them warm

The easiest way to get the shaped flatbread dough onto a hot baking stone is with a baking peel. A rimless baking sheet also works. Or you can use both hands to lay the dough on the stone or tiles. To use a peel or baking sheet, dust it lightly with flour, set the dough on it, letting one edge hang off the rim a bit. As you put the peel on the hot stone, the dough usually catches. Pull the peel out sharply and close the oven door quickly.

Flatbreads bake quickly. When the bottom crust lifts up slightly and the top has golden patches, it's done. Let the breads rest briefly on a rack, for about five minutes, while they give off steam and firm up slightly. But don't let them cool completely. Wrap the breads in a cotton cloth while they're still warm, adding more to the stack as they're baked and rested, and serve them as soon as possible. As they cool, they harden and dry out, becoming more cracker-like.

We think the best way to store these breads is in the form of unbaked risen dough, but if you have leftover baked flatbreads, wrap them tightly in plastic (once they're completely cool) and store at room temperature, or freeze. To refresh them, microwave them briefly just before serving, or wrap them in foil and heat them in a 250°F oven until warm.

Georgian Baton Bread (*Shotis Puri*)

The whole-wheat flour makes these puffy, baton-like breads more interesting but can be replaced with all-purpose flour. *Yields eight breads.*

1 tsp. active dry yeast
2½ cups lukewarm water (about 100°F)
5 oz. (1 cup) whole-wheat flour
24 oz. (5½ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour; more or less as needed
1 Tbs. coarse salt

To make the dough—In a large bowl, dissolve the yeast in the water. Add the whole-wheat flour and about 2 cups of the all-purpose flour. Stir in the same direction until smooth and then stir another 1 min. Cover the bowl with plastic; set in a cool place for at least 10 min. or up to 3 hours.

Stir in the salt. Gradually add 2 to 3 cups flour, mixing the dough until it's too stiff to stir. Turn out the dough onto a lightly floured surface. Wash, dry, and lightly oil the bowl. Knead the dough, letting it absorb as much flour as needed (by keeping the work surface dusted), until it's smooth and elastic but still a little tacky, 10 to 15 min.

Put the dough in the bowl, cover well with plastic, and let rise in a cool place for 8 hours or overnight. If you're not ready to bake yet, punch down the dough, put it in a plastic bag, and refrigerate it for up to 3 days.

To shape and bake—About 1¼ hours before you want to serve the breads, set an oven rack to a middle or lower middle rung. Put a large baking stone or unglazed quarry tiles on it, leaving a 1-inch gap around the border. Heat the oven to 475°F. Turn out the dough onto a lightly floured



Get them while they're hot. Like all tandoor flatbreads, these Georgian Batons—puffy and tender in the middle, crisper at the wings—are at their best right after baking.

surface. Cut it into 4 equal pieces. Shape each piece into a ball, cover them, and let rest for 5 to 10 min.

Cut one ball in half (leave the other balls covered) and turn the cut surfaces down. Flatten each half with your lightly floured palm to a 6x4-inch oval. Cover loosely. Halve and flatten the remaining pieces the same way. Let the ovals rest, covered, for 10 min. so they're easier to shape.

Fill a small bowl with water. Dust a rimless baking sheet or peel lightly with flour and follow the shaping photos below.

Transfer the dough to the baking stone, keeping it on one side if possible, and stretch and dent another oval and bake it alongside the first.

Bake the breads until their tops are lightly touched with color and the bottoms have a golden crust, 5 to 7 min. Remove them with a peel or long-handled spatula and transfer to a rack to cool for about 5 min. Wrap them in a cotton cloth to keep them soft and warm, and repeat with the remaining 6 ovals.

(Another recipe follows)

For Georgian Batons, dimple all over and stretch the “wings”



Working with one oval at a time, pull gently on opposite ends to begin to make wings or batons.



Dip your fingertips in water and press them firmly and repeatedly into the dough, making dents (the water helps prevent sticky fingers and gives a gleam to the bread).



Stretch the baton again to about 12 inches and make dents in the wings with wet fingertips. Put it on the peel or baking sheet, leaving one wing dangling over the edge a bit. Bake as directed in the recipe.



Pricking the centers of Silk Road Naan keeps them thin and cracker-like in the middle but soft and tender around the rim.

Silk Road Naan

Lamb fat is traditional for these Central Asian flatbreads, but a mix of butter and oil works, too. *Yields twelve 8-inch breads.*

2 tsp. active dry yeast
3 cups lukewarm water (about 100°F)
9 oz. (2 cups) whole-wheat flour
24 oz. (about 5 1/3 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour; more or less as needed
1 Tbs. coarse salt; more for sprinkling
2 Tbs. olive oil plus 1 Tbs. melted unsalted butter (or 3 Tbs. rendered lamb fat, melted); more fat or melted butter for brushing
Fresh chives or scallions (optional)

To make the dough—In a large bowl, dissolve the yeast in the water. Add the whole-wheat flour, 1 cup at a time, and then add 1 cup of the all-purpose flour. Stir in the same direction until smooth, and then stir another 1 min. If you have time, cover the bowl with plastic and let rest for 30 min.

Stir in the 1 Tbs. salt. Fold in the oil and melted butter or the lamb fat. Gradually add another 3 to 4 cups flour, mixing the dough until it's too stiff to stir. Turn it out onto a lightly floured surface. Wash, dry, and lightly oil the bowl. Knead the dough, letting it absorb as much flour as

needed (by keeping the work surface dusted), until it's smooth and elastic but still a little sticky, about 15 min. Put the dough in the oiled bowl, cover with plastic, and let rise in a cool place for 8 hours or overnight. If you're not ready to bake, punch down the dough, put it in a plastic bag, and refrigerate it for up to 3 days.

To shape and bake—About 1 1/4 hours before you want to serve the breads, set an oven rack on an upper middle rung. Put a large baking stone or unglazed quarry tiles on it, leaving a 1-inch gap around the border. Heat the oven to 500°F.

Turn out the dough onto a lightly floured surface and cut it in half. Cover 1 half; cut the other into 6 equal pieces. Shape each piece into a ball, flatten it with a lightly floured palm, and cover it. Cut the remaining dough into 6 equal pieces and flatten them the same way. Let the balls rest for 10 to 15 min. so they're easier to shape.

Melt about 1 Tbs. butter or lamb fat, finely chop the chives, if using, and set them on your work surface, along with a pastry brush and salt. Lightly dust a rimless baking sheet or peel with flour. Follow the shaping photos below. Transfer the dough to the baking stone and prepare the next round, baking it alongside the first.

Bake until each bread is well-flecked with gold, 5 to 7 min. Remove with a peel or long-handled spatula and put on a rack to cool for about 5 min. Wrap in a cotton cloth to keep them soft and warm, and repeat with the remaining rounds.

Jeffrey Alford and Naomi Duguid travel the world, collecting recipes. Their recent book, *Hot, Sour, Salty, Sweet*, won the James Beard Cookbook of the Year award. ♦

Roll out Silk Road Naan and prick with a fork



Roll out two flattened balls to thin 8-inch rounds, alternating between one and the other to give the dough time to relax. Roll out the others, cover them, and let rest for 15 minutes.



Put one dough round on the peel or rimless baking sheet (near the edge), and stamp or prick the center of the round thoroughly with a fork, leaving a 1-inch rim.



Lightly brush all over with melted butter or lamb fat, and sprinkle the center with a generous pinch of salt and finely chopped chives or scallions, if using. Bake as directed in the recipe.

Authentic Mexican Enchiladas with an American Twist

Build a better enchilada
by coating the tortillas
with red chile sauce or
green tomatillo sauce
before filling and baking

BY JIM PEYTON

Enchiladas hold a place in the Mexican culinary psyche similar to the place of hot dogs, hamburgers, and Philly cheesesteaks hold in ours, but to a greater depth. They belong to the oldest and most popular family of Mexican dishes, *antojitos mexicanos*—literally “Mexican style whims”—a group that includes other corn- and tortilla-based foods such as tacos, tamales, quesadillas, and gorditas. The word *enchilada* comes from the Spanish verb *encharlar*, which is defined as “to season with chile.” But what’s missing from that definition is any hint of the culinary magic that has made this dish, from its



Red Chile Enchiladas

simplest to its most exotic forms, an overwhelming favorite on both sides of the border.

You probably know enchiladas as they're served in Mexican-American restaurants, either alone or as the star of a combination plate. There the enchilada is most often a corn tortilla wrapped around a filling of cheese, shredded meat or poultry, covered with a flour-thickened chile sauce, topped with lots of cheese, onion, and sometimes sour cream, and then baked until the cheese topping is molten.

In Mexico, enchiladas are rarely served this way, in part because many homes still do not have ovens, and because *queso amarillo*, or yellow cheese, remains pretty much confined to Mexican-American cooking. Most often the tortilla is dipped in sauce first, then fried in a little oil and wrapped around a cheese, meat, or poultry filling and served directly with a topping of cheese or cooked vegetables. No blanket of thick sauce and cheese, and no baking required.

My enchilada recipes represent the best of both worlds. I like to fry and coat the tortillas with sauce first in the Mexican style, but I also top them with extra sauce and cheese and then bake them to get that soft, melting quality that Americans are used to.

The sauce makes the enchilada

To the uninitiated, a recipe for a Mexican sauce might appear to be an unusual collection of seemingly incompatible ingredients. But through skillful technique, these ingredients combine to take on an entirely new identity that is nothing short of sublime. So crucial is the sauce that, in Mexico, it often defines the enchilada. For instance, enchiladas made with red chile sauce are referred to as *enchiladas rojas* (red enchiladas), and those made with tomatillo and green chile sauce are called *enchiladas verdes* (green enchiladas).

Toasting or broiling the sauce ingredients is crucial to building complexity of flavor, so it's important not to fast-forward through this step. Make sure these ingredients are well toasted before you go any further. Don't mistake well toasted for burnt, however. Once you've properly toasted and broiled all the ingredients, you'll purée them into a paste that you'll fry briefly before adding a healthy dose of water or broth. The last step is a good simmer to thicken the sauce and complete the marriage of flavors.

Enchilada fillings can be just about anything edible. Most common today, in both Mexico and the United States, is a filling of grated cheese, followed by cooked and shredded meat or poultry, and sometimes seafood, especially shrimp and crab, or a spoonful of a stew or *mole*. There are lots of ways to make fillings of shredded meat and poultry, but the easiest is to cut the meat into bite-size pieces, simmer it in water or broth until tender, and then shred it, either by hand or with the plastic blade of a food processor.



Fry the sauce paste briefly to concentrate and meld the flavors.

Cheese is the most popular enchilada topping. Many of the Mexican cheeses used for enchiladas, including Oaxaca, Chihuahua, *panela*, *fresco*, and *añejo* or *enchilado* (a type of *añejo* coated in chile powder), are now available in North America at Mexican and Latin American markets. I usually reserve Oaxaca and Chihuahua for fillings because they melt very well, but the rest make great toppings, providing additional flavors and textures. In Mexico, cooked diced carrots, potatoes, and chorizo sausage are also typical toppings, as are a dollop of *crema* (a thick Mexican cream similar to the French *crème fraîche*) and a sprinkling of minced onion.

Frying tortillas makes them easy to roll

Corn tortillas for enchiladas are "softened" in hot oil, either before or after being coated with sauce. A little oil is heated over medium heat, and then each tortilla is fried briefly on both sides. The result is a pliable, sog-proof tortilla. Tortillas that are slightly on the stale side are best suited for this treatment because they absorb less oil and won't spatter as much while cooking, but fresh ones work fine, too. Softening the tortillas after they've been coated with sauce first—an approach usually reserved for red chile sauces—cooks the sauce right into the tortillas, making them *muy rico* (very rich).

RECIPES

Red Chile Sauce

You'll only need about 2 cups of this sauce to make the enchiladas, but any leftover sauce can be used to coat baked chicken, to flavor rice, or to mix into some mayonnaise for a tasty sandwich spread. The sauce can be made ahead and refrigerated for up to 3 days or frozen for up to a month. *Yields about 3 cups.*

2½ oz. dried ancho chiles (about 4 large, 5 medium, or 6 small)
2 Tbs. vegetable oil



Brush a thin layer of sauce on the tortilla—just enough to coat.



Use a spatula to flip the softened tortilla. Tongs would tear it.



**1 small white onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, chopped
1/4 cup sesame seeds
1/2 cup drained canned tomatoes, seeded
1 tsp. dried oregano
1/4 tsp. ground cumin
3 cups mild chicken broth or water
1 tsp. cider vinegar
2 bay leaves
3/4 tsp. salt; more to taste**

Heat a skillet over medium heat. Add the dried chiles one at a time and cook them for 20 to 30 seconds on each side, pressing down with a spatula, until soft, pliable, and slightly redder in spots. Don't let the chiles burn; you'll end up with a bitter sauce. Rinse the chiles, remove the stems, veins, and seeds, and tear each one into two or three pieces. Put them in a small saucepan with enough water to cover and cook at a very gentle simmer until well softened, about 20 min.

Meanwhile, in a saucepan or large skillet, heat 1 Tbs. of the vegetable oil, add the chopped onion, and sauté over medium-high heat until the edges of the onion are deeply browned, about 10 min. Add the garlic; cook for another 1 min., and set the pan aside.

At the same time, toast the sesame seeds in a dry skillet set over moderately low heat until they're a deep golden brown. Stir the seeds frequently to keep them from burning and pour them onto a plate to cool as soon as they're fully toasted.

Drain the chiles (discard the cooking water) and put them in a blender. Add the sautéed onion and garlic, sesame seeds, tomatoes, oregano, cumin, and 1 cup of the broth or water. Blend until completely

smooth, about 2 min. You should have a medium-thick paste; if it's too thick, thin it with a little broth or water.

Wipe clean and reheat the skillet you used to sauté the onions. Add the remaining 1 Tbs. vegetable oil. When the oil is hot, add the paste from the blender. Cook the paste for 3 min., stirring constantly with a whisk or wooden spoon. Stir in the remaining broth, vinegar, bay leaves, and salt. Bring to a simmer and cook until the sauce begins to thicken, about 20 min. Discard the bay leaves. Taste and adjust the seasoning with more salt if needed. The sauce should still be a bit thin; it will thicken further when the enchiladas are cooked. Let cool slightly before making the enchiladas.

Roll enchiladas loosely and don't overfill them. A heaping tablespoon of filling is all you need.

(More recipes follow)

Blackened but not completely black. The sound of a tomatillo popping in the oven is a clue that the sauce ingredients are almost ready.



Red Chile Enchiladas

These are delicious alone or served alongside Mexican rice (see *Fine Cooking* #35, p. 42), and some shredded cabbage in a tart vinaigrette. If you can find Mexican cheese, use *queso* Oaxaca or Chihuahua in place of the Jack cheese and *queso fresco* instead of the feta. *Yields 12 enchiladas; serves four.*

2 cups water
1 tsp. coarse salt
1 Tbs. white vinegar
3 small carrots, peeled and cut into 1/4-inch slices (to yield 3/4 cup)
1/4 lb. red-skinned or Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and cut into a 1/4-inch dice (to yield 3/4 cup)
2 Tbs. vegetable oil; more as needed
1 oz. (2 Tbs.) crumbled Mexican-style bulk chorizo sausage or any other spicy-hot fresh sausage
Red chile sauce (see the recipe on p. 78)
12 corn tortillas, 6 inches in diameter
5 oz. (1 1/4 cups) grated Jack or Cheddar cheese
2 oz. (1/2 cup) crumbled feta cheese

In a medium-size, nonreactive saucepan, combine the water, salt, and vinegar. Bring to a boil, add the carrots, and simmer until just tender, 5 min. Remove them from the water, shock under cold running water, and reserve. Repeat with the potatoes, cooking them about 3 min. Heat 1 Tbs. of the oil in a medium skillet over medium-high heat. Add the carrots, potatoes, and sausage. Sauté briskly until the sausage is crisp and the vegetables are browned, 10 to 12 min. Set aside.

Heat the oven to 400°F. If the sauce has been chilled, heat it until just warm and thin it with a bit of water if necessary. Heat a skillet over medium-high heat. With a pastry brush, lightly coat both sides of a tortilla with the sauce. Pour about 1 Tbs. oil into the pan, swirling to coat. The pan should be lightly and evenly filmed with oil. Set the tortilla in the pan and cook until it just begins to brown, 10 to 20 seconds, pressing down with a spatula when the tortilla puffs. Flip the tortilla over and cook the other side in the same way. When cooked on both sides, each tortilla should be very pliable but not soft enough to tear when handled. The tortilla will begin to crisp around

the edges, but don't let it become so hard that it can't be easily rolled. Drain on paper towels. Add more oil to the pan if needed; repeat with the remaining tortillas.

Mix 3/4 cup of the grated Jack or Cheddar with the feta. Arrange a heaping tablespoon of the cheese mixture just off center of a tortilla and loosely roll or fold the tortilla into a cylinder. Repeat with the remaining cheese and tortillas, setting the rolled enchiladas side by side and seam side down in a 9x13-inch baking dish as you go. Spoon a scant cup of sauce over all, sprinkle with the remaining grated cheese, and then sprinkle on the carrots, potatoes, and sausage. Bake for about 7 min. and then drizzle on about 1/2 cup more sauce. Continue baking until the cheese is melted and starts to bubble, about 10 min. Serve.

Creamy Tomatillo Sauce

The addition of heavy cream or *crème fraîche* qualifies enchiladas made with this sauce as *enchiladas suizas* (Swiss-style enchiladas). The sauce can be made ahead and refrigerated for up to 2 days or frozen for up to a month. *Yields about 3 1/2 cups sauce.*

1 lb. fresh tomatillos, husks and stems removed, rinsed
2 or 3 fresh serrano chiles, cored and seeded, or 1 canned chipotle pepper, seeded
4 slices white onion, each 1/4 inch thick
3 cloves garlic
2 Tbs. chopped fresh cilantro
2 Tbs. vegetable oil
3 cups chicken broth
3/4 cup *crème fraîche* or heavy cream
3/4 tsp. salt; more to taste

Position a rack as close to the broiler as possible and heat the broiler. Arrange the tomatillos, fresh chiles (if using), onion slices, and garlic in a small, shallow baking pan. Broil, turning to ensure even cooking, until the tomatillos are soft and slightly blackened, about 10 min. Transfer the broiled ingredients to a blender and add the cilantro (if you're using a canned chipotle, add it now, too). Blend until smooth.

Heat the oil in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat. Add the tomatillo mixture and cook, stirring, for 2 to 3 min. Add 2 cups of the broth and simmer until the sauce is thick enough to coat the back of a spoon, about 20 min. Taste the sauce. It should be a little tart, but it shouldn't make your mouth pucker. If it's too tart, add more broth and simmer until the sauce thickens again. Remove from the heat and whisk in the *crème fraîche* or heavy cream and the salt. Let cool slightly before making the enchiladas.

Chicken Enchiladas with Creamy Tomatillo Sauce

This is a great destination for leftover chicken or turkey. If you have some on hand, use it instead of the chicken thighs. If you can find Mexican cheese, try *queso panela* or *queso añejo* instead of the mozzarella and provolone. *Serves four.*

1 lb. boneless, skinless chicken thighs (to yield about 2 cups shredded cooked meat)
Salt to taste



Tangy tomatillo sauce makes it Mexican. The golden blanket of cheese on these chicken enchiladas is an American touch.

Vegetable oil as needed

12 corn tortillas, 6 inches in diameter

Creamy tomatillo sauce (see the recipe at left)

4 oz. (1 cup) grated mozzarella

1 1/3 oz. (1/3 cup) grated provolone

Fill a medium saucepan with water and bring it to a boil. Add the chicken thighs and a bit of salt; simmer until cooked through and tender, about 20 min. Cool the meat; shred (discarding any fat or gristle), season with salt, and set aside.

Fill a large skillet with enough oil to submerge a tortilla (between 1/4 to 1/2 inch). Warm the oil over medium heat until a drop of water sizzles immediately. Fry each tortilla briefly in the oil, about 10 seconds per side. Use a spatula rather than tongs to flip the tortillas, as they'll tear easily. The tortilla should stay soft; if it starts to harden, it has been in the oil too long. Drain on paper towels.

Heat the oven to 400°F. With a pastry brush, spread a thin layer of sauce on both sides of each tortilla. Spoon a heaping tablespoon of shredded chicken just off center of each tortilla and roll into loose cylinders. Set the enchiladas side by side in a 9x13-inch baking dish, pour the remaining sauce over them, top with the cheeses, and bake until bubbling and parts are lightly browned, 15 to 20 min.

Jim Peyton is the author of three Mexican cookbooks. He lives in San Antonio, Texas, where he teaches Mexican cooking classes. ♦



drink choices

Try lager-style beers or a fruity, off-dry wine like Chenin Blanc

It's no accident that Mexican lager-style beers are the beverage of choice with spicy Mexican and Southwestern cuisine. The malty sweetness in many of these brews not only quenches the thirst, but it also helps to take the edge off the chiles' heat. My favorites include the light, crisp *Carta Blanca*, the amber *Pilsner*-styled *Bohemia*, and the richer, darker *Negro Modelo*. If you can't find these or other Mexican beers, try a good-quality American ale like *Samuel Adams*.

You needn't limit your choices to beer, though, when it comes to finding the right partner for enchiladas. An off-dry to slightly sweet white or even a blush wine can be just as enticing and delicious. Just

don't be misled by the "spicy wines with spicy food" myth. So-called spicy wines like Alsace Gewürztraminer actually tend to be too high in alcohol to work well with spicy foods, the combination of alcohol and heat resulting in a pronouncedly bitter aftertaste. Instead, try a fruity Chenin Blanc by Hogue Cellars (\$7), Latah Creek in Washington State (\$10), Dry Creek Vineyards (\$8), or Pine Ridge (\$12) in the Napa Valley. White Zinfandels will work well with these recipes, too: De Loach and Rosenblum (both \$10) are good candidates.

Master sommelier Tim Gaiser is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*. Retail prices are approximate.

Baking Moist, Tender
Upside-Down
Cakes



Team smooth caramel, tender cake, and fruit or nut toppings for three fresh, irresistible versions of a homespun favorite

BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE

Upse-down cakes have a lot more going for them than the mere novelty of being baked upside down. At their best, traditional upside-down cakes combine three elements—smooth caramel, juicy fruit topping, and tender cake—into one amazing combination of textures and flavors. The key to a great cake with a soft crumb and moist, tender topping lies, quite simply, in knowing how to make each component taste its very best.

What's more, there's not just one path to great results—upside-down cakes can be a mix-and-match affair. For the caramel, you can use traditional

melted white sugar or a mixture of brown sugar and butter. For the topping, you can use fresh fruit, dried fruit, or even nuts. And you can vary the flavor of the cake, too.

After experimenting with a lot of combinations, I've come up with three really delicious upside-down cakes: fresh pineapple (how could I resist?), dried apricot and cranberry, and chocolate-nut. This last one is a definite departure from the fruit toppings you might expect, but after you've tried it, you'll see why it's one of the favorite cakes in my repertoire (even after the scores of upside-downers I made while working on this story).

Choose from two types of caramel

The caramel in an upside-down cake is like the icing on a cake—only it starts out on the bottom, which becomes the top. You can make a caramel from either white or brown sugar; both produce delicious and distinctive results.

A traditional caramel of boiled sugar and water gives the cakes a sophisticated sheen and a flavor I describe as bittersweet. I've used this type of caramel in the recipe for Dried Apricot & Cranberry Upside-Down Cakes on p. 85. When poured into the ramekins, the caramel hardens immediately. Then, as the cakes bake and the fruit lets go of its juice, the caramel loosens into a glossy topping. It's very important that the fruit you choose is sturdy

Reserve the liquid after poaching dried apricots and cranberries. You'll use it to flavor the cake batter and to help the caramel liquefy as the cakes bake.



A little trial and error is okay when pouring caramel. If the caramel is a shade too light (see colors on p. 84), put the pan back on the heat for a few seconds.



Getting caramel just right



Too light.
Caramel cooked to a light amber won't give the roasty flavor you're looking for—it will just taste sweet.



Just right.
Caramel cooked to deep amber is the right amount of bittersweet.



Too dark.
Caramel cooked this long will have unpleasantly bitter flavors. It's best to start over.

enough to stay relatively intact yet juicy enough to dissolve the caramel as the cake bakes. (I think it's one of the reasons that pineapple is often the upside-down cake fruit of choice). If the fruit isn't juicy, the hardened caramel won't loosen into a moist topping—it will stay stuck in the bottom of the pan, or it will come out in shards.

For flavor that's the right degree of bittersweet, I like to cook this type of caramel to a deep amber. Paying attention to color gradation is the best way to get the caramel just right, as you'll see from the photos at left. A little trial and error is okay here. If the caramel looks a bit too light after you've poured a little, no problem. Simply set the pot back on the heat to cook for ten seconds or so more and then pour again when the caramel is a touch darker. (If the caramel gets too dark, you'll get too much burnt sugar flavor, so you'll need to start over.) When pouring caramel for the apricot upside-down cakes, you'll notice that the first ramekin will be lighter than the sixth, because the hot caramel will continue to cook and darken off the heat. Add the last bits of caramel to the lightest ramekin to even out the color and the flavor. When making caramel, be sure to use a heavy-based pot with a sturdy handle and a stainless interior, which lets you monitor color change in a way that a dark pan doesn't. Work carefully—a burn from molten caramel is nasty.

Brown sugar and butter make a simple, homey syrup that's just the right amount of gooey. Calling this syrup caramel is using the term a little loosely; you don't cook the brown sugar to a candy-like stage the way you do with the traditional white-sugar caramel described above. The brown sugar topping is the simpler of the two; you can use it for any of these cakes, and it's the best choice for the Chocolate Nut Upside-Down Cake (on p. 87), since the nuts obviously won't release any liquid as the cake bakes.

Try juicy fresh fruit or poached dried fruit for the topping

I make upside-down cakes with all kinds of fresh fruit, as long as it's ripe and juicy. You can turn out delicious versions using pears, peaches, apricots, apples, cherries, and, of course, pineapple.

Dried fruit works, too, when you poach it first. Last winter during a blizzard, I had a yen for upside-down cake but hadn't a single piece of fresh fruit in the house. Much to my delight, though, I discovered that dried fruit makes a great upside-down cake topping when it's softened and plumped before being arranged on the set caramel. This is particularly im-

portant if you're using traditional caramel, which, again, needs juices to liquefy it during baking. Apple juice, cranberry juice, orange juice, and even white wine all work well as a poaching medium. Dried fruit soaks up juice, and it usually won't need draining after poaching. For the apricot upside-down cake, you'll reserve some of the poaching liquid to drizzle into each lined ramekin before you pour in the batter to ensure that the caramel softens sufficiently during baking.

Overlap the fruit but don't overload the pan. An overcrowded pan will make for a sloppy-looking, soggy finished cake. For the best balance between cake and fruit, slice the fruit about a quarter-inch thick and overlap it just slightly. I usually scatter the fruit slices for a casual, more rustic feel, but if you like a more patterned look, go ahead and arrange it more formally.

The cake needs to be sturdy yet spongy—and have a tangy flavor

The cake is the third member of the upside-down trio, and texture is key. Rich butter cakes and pound cakes are too dense to absorb the flavors, while light sponge cakes (like traditional French génoises or chiffon cakes) aren't sturdy enough to support the fruit and juices. A tender cake that's not too light or too heavy is best. Like many other cakes, my upside-down cakes have the best texture when the batter is

mixed until just blended. Overmixing will result in holes and tunnels (a sure sign of an overworked batter) and in a tough, dense cake, rather than a tender one.

I like to keep the cake's flavor simple so that it doesn't upstage the fruit and caramel. A bit of grated orange zest or cinnamon gives the cake a little flavor bridge to the other components without overwhelming them. And I moisten the batter with either yogurt or buttermilk, both of which give the cake a subtle tang and tender crumb that make a nice contrast to the sweet caramel and fruit juices.

I know it's a huge leap of faith to just flip a cake pan over, so here are a couple of hints to make sure that all goes well. First, as soon as the cake comes out of the oven, run a paring knife around the inside edge of the pan to loosen the cake. Then, immediately cover it with a flat plate and flip the pan over. Don't be afraid—just do it. Let the inverted pan rest for about 5 minutes (no peeking) to let the heat from the cake help loosen the topping. Next, gently lift the pan, pause to admire your handiwork...and dig in.

**Upside-downers
are a happy trio
of caramel,
topping, and cake.**



"Adding batter in scoopfuls instead of pouring it into the pan helps avoid jostling the fruit," says Abby Dodge.

RECIPES

Fresh Pineapple Upside-Down Cake

Tangy pineapple and a buttery-sweet brown sugar topping are a good match for this yogurt cake. If you don't have a square pan, a 9x2-inch round pan works too. Serves eight to ten.

FOR THE CARAMEL:

**¾ cup packed dark brown sugar
2 oz. (4 Tbs.) butter**

FOR THE FRUIT:

1 small, ripe pineapple, trimmed, quartered, cored, and cut into ¼-inch-thick slices

FOR THE CAKE:

**8 oz. (2 cups) cake flour
2½ tsp. baking powder
¼ tsp. salt
4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature
¾ cup sugar
1½ tsp. finely grated orange zest
1 tsp. vanilla extract
2 large eggs
⅔ cup plain nonfat yogurt**

Heat the oven to 350°F and lightly butter the sides of an 8-inch square pan.

Make the caramel—In a small saucepan, combine the brown sugar and butter. Cook over medium heat, stirring often, until the butter is melted and the mixture is smooth. Bring to a boil and pour into the prepared pan. Spread with a spatula to coat the bottom evenly. Scatter or arrange the pineapple slices evenly in the



caramel, overlapping them slightly. Gently press the fruit into the caramel.

Make the cake—Sift together the cake flour, baking powder, and salt. In a medium bowl, beat the butter with an electric mixer until smooth. Gradually add the sugar and continue beating until fluffy and lighter in color, about 3 min. Beat in the orange zest and vanilla. Add the eggs one at a time, beating briefly after each addition. Sprinkle half of the flour mixture over the butter mixture and, on low speed, mix just until the flour disappears. Add the yogurt and mix until just blended. Gently mix in the remaining flour. Scoop large spoonfuls of batter onto the fruit; gently spread the batter evenly in the pan. Lightly tap the pan on the counter to settle the batter. Bake until the cake is golden brown and a pick inserted in the center comes out clean, about 45 min. Immediately run a paring knife around the inside edge of the pan. Set a flat serving plate on top of the pan and invert the cake. Let the inverted pan rest for about 5 min. to let the topping settle. Gently remove the pan and serve the cake warm or at room temperature.

**Fresh Pineapple
Upside-Down
Cake has it all—
tangy-sweet
flavors and gooey,
tender textures.**

Dried Apricot & Cranberry Upside-Down Cakes

The cornmeal flavor of these polenta cakes is a delicious complement to the dried fruit. You can line the ramekins with the caramel and fruit a day ahead. These

Run a paring knife around the inside of the pan as soon as the cake comes out of the oven to help ensure easy unmolding.



little gems are best served warm, but they're good at room temperature, too. Serves six.

FOR THE CARAMEL:

1 cup sugar
3 Tbs. water

FOR THE FRUIT:

12 dried apricots
1 cup fresh orange juice
Pinch ground cinnamon
1/3 cup dried cranberries

FOR THE POLENTA CAKES:

3 1/4 oz. (3/4 cup) yellow cornmeal
5 1/4 oz. (1 1/4 cups plus 1 Tbs.) all-purpose flour
1/3 cup sugar
2 1/2 tsp. baking powder
1/4 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. ground cinnamon
3/4 cup buttermilk
Reserved fruit poaching liquid (from above)
3 oz. (6 Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted and cooled
1 large egg

Lightly butter six 8-oz. ramekins.

Make the caramel—In a heavy saucepan, stir the sugar and water together. Cook over medium heat, stirring frequently to dissolve the sugar. Cook until the sugar is completely dissolved; this is very important. Turn the heat to high and boil until the sugar is light amber (see p. 84). Swirl the pan over the heat to evenly distribute the caramel. Continue to cook until the caramel is a deep amber (see p. 84). Keep a close watch; the sugar will go from medium to deep amber quite quickly. Immediately pour the caramel into the ramekins and swirl each one right away to coat the bottom evenly. Set aside to cool.

Prepare the fruit—In a small saucepan, combine the dried apricots, orange juice, and cinnamon. Cover and simmer until the apricots are plump and tender, about 12 min. Add the dried cranberries and simmer another 2 min. Strain, reserving all of the poaching liquid. Set aside 1/4 cup of this liquid to flavor the cake batter and reserve the rest to moisten the caramel. Put the fruit on a plate to cool completely; don't blot or drain. Cut each apricot into thirds on the diagonal. Arrange the fruit decoratively in each of the caramel-lined ramekins, as in the photo on p. 83.

Make the cake—Set a baking sheet on the middle rack of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. In a medium bowl, whisk the cornmeal, flour, sugar, baking powder, salt, and cinnamon until blended. In a small bowl, whisk together the buttermilk, the reserved



"I know it's scary to just flip a cake pan over, but trust me, it'll be okay," says Abby.



Let the inverted pan rest for five minutes so the topping can settle, and then lift off the pan.

1/4 cup poaching liquid, the melted butter, and the egg. Pour the wet ingredients over the dry ingredients and gently fold until the batter is just blended. Add 1 tsp. of the remaining poaching liquid to each ramekin; swirl to distribute the liquid. Spoon the cake batter evenly into the ramekins. Lightly tap the ramekins on the counter to settle the ingredients. Set the ramekins on the heated baking sheet and bake until the edges are browned and a pick inserted in the center comes out clean, 25 to 30 min. Immediately run a paring knife around the inside edge of each



What's not to love about Chocolate Nut Upside-Down Cake? Crunchy nuts and tender cake make for delicious counterpoint.

ramekin and invert onto serving plates. Let the inverted ramekins rest for 5 min. to let the topping settle. Gently remove the ramekins and serve.

Chocolate Nut Upside-Down Cake

For the toasted nuts, I like a mixture of whole hazelnuts (roughly chopped after toasting and skinning), slivered almonds, and large walnut pieces. This cake is easiest to cut with a serrated knife at room temperature. It's still delicious a day after baking, but I can't guarantee it will be around that long. *Serves eight to ten.*

FOR THE CARAMEL:

**¾ cup packed dark brown sugar
2½ oz. (5 Tbs.) unsalted butter
3 Tbs. water**

FOR THE NUTS:

1¼ cups toasted assorted unsalted nuts (see note above)

FOR THE CAKE:

**6 oz. (1½ cups) all-purpose flour
1½ oz. (½ cup) unsweetened natural cocoa powder
¾ tsp. baking powder
¼ tsp. baking soda
¼ tsp. salt
5 oz. (10 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature
1 cup sugar
1 tsp. vanilla extract
3 large eggs
½ cup buttermilk**

Heat the oven to 350°F and lightly butter the sides of a 9x2-inch round cake pan.

Make the caramel—In a small saucepan, combine the brown sugar, butter, and water. Cook over medium heat, stirring often, until the butter is melted and the mixture is smooth. Bring to a boil and pour into the prepared pan, swirling to coat the bottom evenly. Scatter in the nuts evenly and gently press them in.

Make the cake—Sift together the flour, cocoa powder, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. In a medium bowl, beat the butter with an electric mixer until smooth. Gradually add the sugar; continue beating until fluffy. Beat in the vanilla. Add the eggs one at a time, beating briefly after each addition. Sprinkle half of the flour mixture over the butter and mix on low speed just until the flour disappears. Add the buttermilk and mix until just blended. Gently mix in the remaining flour. Scoop spoonfuls of batter onto the nuts and gently spread the batter evenly in the pan. Lightly tap the pan on the counter to settle the ingredients.

Bake until a pick inserted in the center comes out clean, about 45 min. Immediately run a paring knife around the inside edge of the pan. Set a flat serving plate on top of the pan and invert the cake. Let the inverted pan rest for about 3 min. to let the topping settle. Gently remove the pan and serve slightly warm or at room temperature.

As a cookbook author and our contributing editor, Abby Dodge turns it upside down in Connecticut. ♦

How to mix and bake the best muffins and cakes

In a recent issue, I discussed the basic recipe formulas that bakers use to create cakes that rise and set properly (see Food Science, *Fine Cooking* #42, p. 78). But having the right amount of butter, flour, eggs, and sugar is only half the battle. The way you combine ingredients and bake the batter can have a huge effect on the texture and structure of your cakes and muffins. Here is part two of the story.

Beating bubbles into fat creates a light cake

There are many techniques for mixing cake batters, but the two most common are the creaming method and the two-stage method, also called the blending method. The method you choose depends in part on the style of cake you want. Some people like an extremely light, well-aerated cake, while others prefer a more velvety, tender texture and will accept a slightly heavier cake in exchange.

If you want a light cake, use the creaming method. The key to a light cake is to trap lots of tiny bubbles in the butter or shortening and then let the leaveners (baking powder or soda) go to work enlarging those bubbles. In the creaming method, you

beat the butter, add the sugar, and continue beating until the mixture is pale and fluffy. Most home bakers give this step short shrift, not aerating the batter fully. It takes at least five minutes (some bakers

ers say ten full minutes), but you can't let the butter get so soft that it melts or you'll lose the bubbles. To keep the butter cool, some bakers chill the bowl and beaters and use refrigerator-cold butter, cut

Same muffin, different oven temperatures. The domed muffin baked at 425°F; the flat one at 325°F.



into cubes. Others stop beating when the butter starts to soften and put the bowl in the freezer for five minutes before continuing.

When the butter and sugar are very light, you beat in the eggs, one at a time so the batter doesn't get lumpy. Bruce Healy, author of *The Art of the Cake*, established that this step doesn't add any volume so you only need to blend until the eggs are well incorporated. The last step is to stir in part of the well-sifted dry ingredients, half of the liquid, more of the dry mixture, the rest of the liquid, and finally the remaining dry mixture.

The alternating addition of flour and liquid ensures that the batter blends evenly, but it also has a potential pitfall: development of too much gluten, which makes the cake tough or leads to tunnels. The first addition of flour gets well coated with fat and doesn't form gluten, but once the liquid is added, uncoated flour proteins (in the next addition) can combine with liquid to form tough gluten. To minimize this, I like to add a lot of the flour in that first addition. Once the liquid is added, you must avoid overmixing in order to limit gluten formation.

(Continued)

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If a cake with a velvety, dissolving texture is your heart's desire, the two-stage method is for you. First you blend all the dry ingredients, all the fat, and a small amount of the total liquid, and then you add the remaining liquid. This method lets the fat coat all the flour proteins and prevents the formation of gluten, producing an incredibly tender cake—so tender that it falls apart in your mouth. This dissolving texture gives the illusion of lightness, but in fact, cakes made by this method are a little heavier than those made by the creaming method.

For casual quick breads and muffins, which aren't intended to be light and airy, use the muffin method. You combine the dry ingredients in one bowl, the wet ingre-

dients in another, and then stir them together. In contrast to the creaming method, the key here is not to stir too long or too vigorously since stirring flour and liquid together forms gluten, and that would make the muffins or quick breads tough.

Oven temperature and pan color make the difference

When a cake bakes, the air bubbles you've beaten into the fat expand until the egg and flour proteins coagulate, the flour's starch gelatinizes, and the cake's structure sets. Larger bubbles mean an airy, coarser textured cake; smaller bubbles give a finer texture but also a denser one.

For finer textured cakes, try a slightly higher baking temperature (350°F). This

will set the cake sooner and keep the bubbles from getting too big. For a lighter cake with a slightly more open texture, a slower oven (325°F) will help. The cake will need a few more minutes in the oven, but the lower temperature will give the bubbles more time to swell before the batter sets.

With cakes, the goal is a level top that's as flat as a skating rink while muffins, in my ideal world, should peak like a volcano. In addition to oven temperature, choosing the right baking pan can help.

Heavy, dull, light-colored aluminum pans absorb less heat, and this makes them the very best choice for level cakes. Gray nonstick pans work all right, too. A dark pan, which absorbs more heat, can set the outside before the inside gets hot. The

wet center will continue to rise and you may end up with a peaked cake.

For muffins to peak, gray pans are excellent. Black pans would also work, but if you're not careful, they'll burn the muffins.

A higher baking temperature (400° to 425°F) is key for a volcanic muffin.

In this case, you want to encourage the outside to set fast and let the inside keep rising. If the muffins brown too fast, reduce the oven temperature for the last ten minutes of baking. Many muffin recipes say to heat the oven to 325° or 350°F, but you won't get good peaks at these temperatures.

Food scientist Shirley O. Corriher is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking* and the author of *Cook Wise*. ♦

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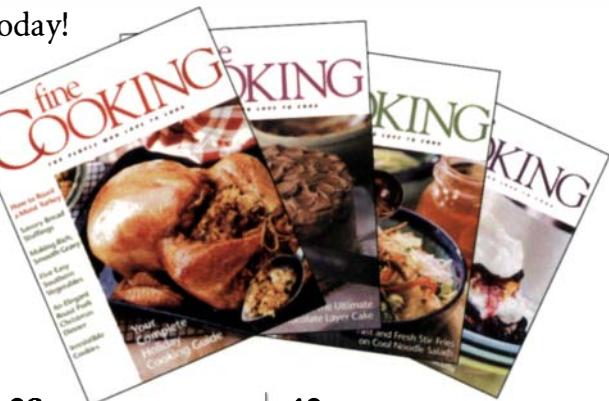
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Technique Class

Parchment cake pan liners are available in a variety of sizes from **Sweet Celebrations** (800/328-6722). A pack of 100 eight-inch liners costs \$5.25 plus shipping.

Kitchen Detail

The KnifeSafe plastic knife sheath shown on p. 40 is made by LamsonSharp and comes in several sizes, for 3-inch paring knives to 10-inch chefs' knives. You can order the sheaths individually from **Professional Cutlery Direct** (800/859-6994; cutlery.com) or in economical packs of 12 from **LamsonSharp** (800/872-6564; lamsonsharp.com). The wall-mounted blade cage and revolving knife carousel are both made by **J.K. Adams**

Co. and can be ordered through the company's shop, **The Kitchen Store** (800/451-6118). The blade cage is also available through **Stacks and Stacks** (877/278-2257; stacksandstacks.com) or **Professional Cutlery Direct** for about the same price.

Sear & Slice Steak Dinners

In addition to hardware and department stores, cast-iron skillets are available from many online sources, including **Amazon.com**. A good source for all kinds of cast-iron cookware, including a 10-inch skillet for \$8.95, is the **1 Southwest Arts & Gifts** site, which can be reached via lodgecookware.com.

French Onion Soup

Molly Stevens recommends French onion soup crocks with a lip around the rim to help support the bread and cheese. **Fante's** (800/443-2683; fantes.com) carries several styles of onion soup bowls, including a set of

four 14-ounce ceramic bowls for \$23.99.

Waffles

For the Chef'sChoice WafflePro 830 Taste/Texture Select, visit edgeref.com; for local retailers, call 800/342-3255; also check **Cooking.com** and **Chefscatalog.com**. The Villaware Classic Waffler is available from **Cookswares.com** (800/915-9788). The Villaware American Waffler with Panini Grill and the Villaware Classic Waffler are available from **Kitchenemporium.com** (888/858-7920). For more on the Toastmaster Cool-Touch Waffle Baker, call 800/947-3744 or visit **Toastmaster.com** (you can order directly from the web site).



Flatbreads

Make sure you measure the inside dimensions of your oven before buying a baking stone or quarry tiles. You'll want as large a surface as possible while still leaving a 1-inch gap around the border for air circulation. (For more about baking stones, see *Fine Cooking* #41, p. 84.) Baking stones (sometimes called pizza stones or pizza bricks) can be round or rectangular and are usually about 1/2 inch thick.

Home Kitchen (877/480-9400; home-kitchen.com) carries a 16-inch round and a 14x16-inch rectangular stone, both \$32.

Sassafras Enterprises (800/537-4941) sells two sizes of rectangular and round stones, ranging from \$16 to \$25. For unglazed quarry tiles, check your local tile shop. Specify unglazed, natural clay, lead-free tiles, and let the salesperson know that you intend to cook on them.

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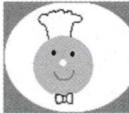
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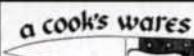
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Recipe (analysis per serving)	Calories total	from fat	Protein (g)	Carb (g)	total	Fats (g)	sat	mono	poly	Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
At the Market - pages 16-18													
<i>Bell Pepper Soup</i>	240	130	4	25	15	2	10	1		0	310	5	per serving
Cuisines - pages 30-32													
<i>Stir-Fried Chicken with Green Beans</i>	370	200	26	17	22	3	5	12		50	1420	4	per serving
Sear & Slice Steak - pages 44-48													
<i>Seared Steak, Pepper & Onion Fajitas</i>	680	320	38	54	36	10	17	7		90	900	10	per serving
<i>Philly Style Mushroom Cheesesteak</i>	490	220	40	30	25	8	10	5		95	1000	4	per serving
<i>Warm Ginger Steak Salad</i>	460	230	34	22	25	6	10	8		75	1720	6	per serving
Onion Soup - pages 49-51													
<i>French Onion Soup</i>	460	190	17	44	21	11	6	3		50	710	6	per serving
Roast Chicken - pages 52-55													
<i>Daniel Boulud's Sear-Roasted Chicken</i>	820	460	70	12	51	17	23	9		300	860	1	per 1/3 chicken
<i>Tom Douglas's Salt-Rubbed Roast Chicken</i>	730	420	70	4	46	18	17	8		310	5400	1	per 1/3 chicken
<i>Stephen Pyles's Butterflied Roast Chicken</i>	700	400	70	3	44	12	21	8		275	860	1	per 1/3 chicken
Sweet Potatoes - pages 56-61													
<i>Sweet Potato & Leek Gratin</i>	600	360	12	52	40	22	14	2		135	800	5	per serving
<i>Bourbon Sweet Potato Pie</i>	480	270	6	44	30	15	10	3		170	330	2	per 1/6 pie
<i>Spicy Roasted Sweet Potatoes</i>	400	90	4	80	10	6	3	0		25	380	8	per serving
<i>Molasses Mashed Sweet Potatoes</i>	290	80	4	53	9	6	3	0		25	370	8	per serving
<i>Sweet Potato & Chile Hash with Fried Egg</i>	430	300	9	28	33	6	16	10		225	970	4	per serving
Waffles - pages 62-65													
<i>Light, Crisp Waffles</i>	290	160	5	25	18	3	4	10		45	380	1	per 1/5 recipe
<i>Brown Sugar Syrup</i>	70	10	0	15	1.0	0.5	0.5	0		5	5	0	per tablespoon
Vegetable Stews - pages 66-71													
<i>Eggplant Ragoût with Tomatoes & Peppers</i>	220	70	6	32	8	1	5	1		0	550	8	per serving
<i>Artichoke Ragoût with Shallots & Fennel</i>	230	80	6	32	9	1	7	1		0	500	8	per serving
<i>Farmhouse Ragoût with Pesto</i>	570	290	11	66	32	4	23	3		0	200	16	per serving
Flatbreads - pages 72-76													
<i>Homestyle Indian Naan</i>	330	50	9	60	6	3	1	1		15	830	2	per 8-inch bread
<i>Georgian Baton Bread (Shots Puri)</i>	360	10	11	76	1.0	0	0	0.5		0	880	4	per bread
<i>Silk Road Naan</i>	310	40	9	59	4.0	1.0	2.0	0.5		5	480	4	per 8-inch bread
Enchiladas - pages 77-81													
<i>Red Chile Sauce</i>	70	45	2	5	5	1	1	2		0	160	1	per 1/4 cup
<i>Red Chile Enchiladas</i>	580	290	22	53	32	12	9	8		50	1370	8	per serving
<i>Creamy Tomatillo Sauce</i>	80	70	1	4	7	3	2	2		15	140	1	per 1/4 cup
<i>Chicken Enchiladas with Tomatillo Sauce</i>	760	420	42	47	46	18	13	12		170	1520	7	per serving
Cakes - pages 82-87													
<i>Fresh Pineapple Upside-Down Cake</i>	370	140	4	56	15	9	4	1		80	200	1	per 1/10 cake
<i>Dried Apricot & Cranberry Upside-Down Cake</i>	520	120	7	94	14	8	4	1		70	250	3	per serving
<i>Chocolate Nut Upside-Down Cake</i>	490	250	8	56	28	12	11	3		110	150	3	per 1/10 cake
Quick & Delicious - page 98													
<i>Garlicky Tortellini, Spinach & Tomato Soup</i>	270	140	15	22	15	9	3	1		35	560	6	per serving

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a

recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a

specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.

A soothing soup, ready in minutes



Garlicky Tortellini, Spinach & Tomato Soup

Serves two to three.

2 Tbs. unsalted butter
6 to 8 cloves garlic, chopped
4 cups (1 qt.) homemade or low-salt chicken broth
6 oz. fresh or frozen cheese tortellini
14 oz. canned diced tomatoes, with their liquid
10 oz. spinach, washed and stemmed; coarsely chopped if large
8 to 10 leaves basil, coarsely chopped
Grated Parmesan cheese, preferably *parmigiano reggiano*

Melt the butter in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add the garlic and sauté until fragrant, about 2 min. Add the broth and bring to a boil. Add the tortellini and cook halfway, about 5 min. for frozen pasta, less if using fresh. Add the tomatoes and their liquid, reduce the heat to a simmer, and cook just until the pasta is tender. Stir in the spinach and basil and cook until wilted, 1 to 2 min. Serve sprinkled with the grated cheese.

Whenever I feel a cold coming on, I turn to this satisfying soup. I figure that with its ample garlic, chicken broth, tomatoes, and spinach, plus its soothing heat, it must be doing something to make me feel better. But even when I'm not sick, I still enjoy this soup. Served with a crusty piece of bread, it makes a delicious lunch or dinner, and it's incredibly easy to make.

If you have some of your own stock handy, so much the better. But because you're adding a lot of flavorful garlic, tomatoes, and fragrant basil to the soup, store-bought broth (preferably low-salt) works fine. I often use the broths packaged in resealable boxes, which taste fresher to me than canned broth. For this soup, boxed broth is especially handy because it comes in one-quart packages. For the canned tomatoes, I prefer organic brands, some of which offer the convenience of being already diced. Spinach can be time-consuming to prep, but once again you can turn to a convenience item—already washed baby spinach—without much of a loss of flavor (although you do pay a premium for it). Both fresh and frozen tortellini work in this soup, the former taking less time to cook.

Once you have your ingredients handy, it's just a matter of throwing everything into the pot with a little time between additions. I like to sauté the garlic in the butter until it's quite fragrant and just on the verge of turning golden brown. Next I pour in the broth and bring it to a boil. I start the tortellini in the broth and cook them until they're a little more than halfway done before adding the tomatoes and turning the soup down to a simmer. Just when the pasta is done, I add handfuls of spinach and a few basil leaves and cook until these are just wilted, which takes only about a minute. Serve the soup hot with some grated Parmesan cheese. I guarantee you'll feel better, even if you weren't sick to start with.

Joanne McAllister Smart is a former associate editor for *Fine Cooking*. ♦

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BY AMY ALBERT

All over New Mexico and in other parts of the Southwest, chile harvest is heralded by the pungent and unmistakable aroma of roasting chiles—at farmers' markets, by the side of the road, in parking lots, and on chile farms. The first moment you get a whiff of that fragrance is a pivotal time of year, for it signals the start of a season that has every bit as much buzz and beauty to it as grape crush in northern California or apple gathering in New England.

The harvest begins in late August, when green chiles are first picked, and it continues as the chiles ripen to red through mid October, ending with the first freeze.



From the fields come truck-loads of chiles, with names like Anaheim, Sandia, and Big Jim.



This chile roaster is a mesh barrel with a gas-powered flame below. A worker cranks the barrel by hand as the chiles roast.

Chile Roasting Season



For maximum flavor, chiles are roasted just until their skins are blistered. The heat is intense, so this barrel only takes about 15 minutes.



Even an experienced chile roaster needs to wear gloves to protect his skin as he packs the chiles—capsaicin, the compound that gives chiles their heat, packs an intense sting.



Roasted chiles are loaded into bags for eagerly awaiting customers, who request mild, medium, or hot roasted chiles to take away.

TURKEY TIPS

- ◆ Choose a fresh, natural turkey. If you must buy a frozen one, allow several days for it to thaw in the refrigerator.
- ◆ Smaller birds fit in the refrigerator better and are easier to handle. If you're hosting a big crowd and have two ovens, consider roasting two smaller birds instead of a large one (this also gives you a good excuse to try two kinds of stuffing).
- ◆ If your turkey isn't kosher, brine it for extra-moist, flavorful meat.
- ◆ Be liberal with the seasoning.
- ◆ For basting, a wide spoon works even better than a turkey baster, especially at the start when there's little juice.
- ◆ To get the turkey out of its roasting pan, stick the handle of a thick wooden spoon in the large cavity between the stuffing (if your bird is stuffed) and the underside of the breastbone. Lift the turkey straight up and out of the pan. If your turkey is very heavy, have someone help you move it to the platter by holding the turkey on both sides with paper towels or kitchen towels.

Turkey Math

For birds under 16 pounds, figure at least 1 pound of turkey per person. For birds 16 pounds and heavier, figure a bit less since there's more meat in proportion to bone. If you want substantial seconds and leftovers, allow another 1/2 pound per person.

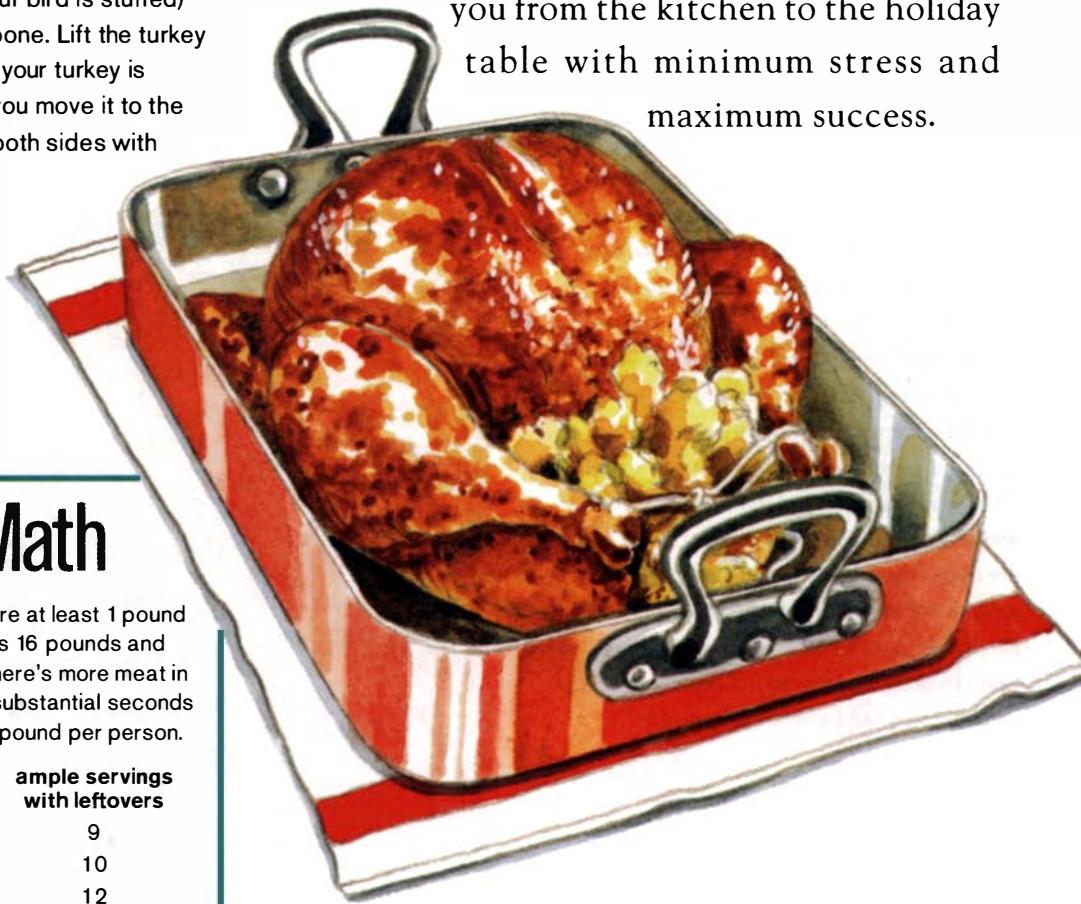
turkey weight (in pounds)	average servings	ample servings with leftovers
14	14	9
16	16	10
18	20	12
20	22	14
24	26	17

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COOKING[®]

Thanksgiving Guide

Let's talk turkey

Even the most confident cook can be intimidated by the task of roasting the holiday turkey and making the trimmings. After all, it's hard to get much practice when you only cook turkey once a year. So we've gathered our best techniques and tips for stuffing and roasting turkey—as well as making gravy—into this guide. We hope this will help get you from the kitchen to the holiday table with minimum stress and maximum success.



How to roast a turkey

1 Brine the bird overnight

(optional but recommended, unless your turkey is kosher)

An overnight soak in brine gives the turkey a chance to absorb both moisture and seasoning. To brine your turkey, find a container large enough to submerge the turkey in brine, such as a large stockpot or a clean bucket. Estimate how much brine you'll need to fill the container and subtract about a gallon to allow for the turkey's volume. For every gallon of brine, you need 1 cup kosher (coarse) salt (or $\frac{3}{4}$ cup table salt) and 1 gallon cool water.

Remove the neck and giblets from the turkey and save them for making gravy. Rinse the turkey and put it in the brine container. Rub the salt over the turkey and then add the cool water. Stir until the salt is mostly dissolved. Store in the refrigerator or a cool place (33° to 40° F) for 8 to 12 hours, turning the turkey once or twice during brining. When you're ready to roast, remove the turkey from the brine and rinse it well to remove any clinging salt.

2 Pick the proper pan

The best pan for cooking a turkey is a heavy-duty roasting pan with about $1\frac{1}{2}$ - to 2-inch-high sides. Higher sides prevent the lower part of the bird from browning and can make basting difficult. Heavy-gauge metal helps keep the drippings from burning, so you'll get better results when you deglaze the pan to make gravy. Make sure the handles are sturdy. The pan should be big enough so that the bird doesn't touch the sides. A rack isn't absolutely necessary, but it makes removing the bird a little easier and improves air circulation.

3 Stuff, tie, and season

Remove the neck and giblets (if still inside) and rinse the turkey if you haven't already done so. Pat it dry with paper towels. Sprinkle the cavity with a little salt and pepper and stuff the bird if that's your plan (see over).

Fold the wings back to secure the neck flap (use a skewer or a toothpick if the flap isn't long enough). Some turkeys come with a metal clasp or a slit in the tail skin to let you simply tuck the legs together; otherwise, use kitchen string to loosely tie the drumsticks. Tying them too tightly can prevent the thighs from cooking evenly.

Rub softened butter or oil all over the surface of the turkey to get a beautifully browned, crisp skin (an alternative is to rub herb butter or other flavored butter under and over the skin). Sprinkle the turkey with ample coarse salt and pepper, as well as dried sage or thyme and a little nutmeg, if you like.

4 Roast the turkey

Position the rack in the lowest part of the oven and heat the oven to 325° F. Some cooks like to blast the turkey with high heat (425° F) for 30 minutes and then reduce the temperature, but roasting at an even 325° F from start to finish is a simple, carefree method. The high-heat method may shave 30 to 90 minutes off the cooking time, but it's one more thing to remember on a very busy kitchen day.

Put the bird in the oven with the legs pointing toward the back of the oven, since it's usually the hottest spot. Roast the turkey until it's done (see "Is it done?" at right). During roasting, baste the bird every 30 to 45 minutes with the pan juices. If the turkey doesn't yield much juice at first, baste it with a little melted butter or oil until you get enough juices for basting. If one part of the

bird is browning too quickly, rotate the pan. If necessary, tent the turkey with foil about two-thirds of the way through cooking to keep it from overbrowning.

When the turkey is done, transfer it to a platter or a cutting board, tent it with foil, and let it rest for 20 to 30 minutes while you prepare the gravy (see over).

Is it done?

Wiggling the leg to see if it's loose will give you an indication that the turkey is ready, but unfortunately, by the time the leg is truly loose, the turkey is sadly overcooked. The only reliable test for doneness is to check the internal temperature. Stick an instant-read thermometer in the thickest part of the thigh, without touching the bone. It should read 175° to 180° F, and the juices should run clear when you remove the thermometer. The breast meat will always cook more quickly. If the turkey is stuffed, check the stuffing's temperature as well: It must be at least 160° F. If the turkey is done before the stuffing, take the turkey from the oven and scoop the stuffing into a casserole to finish cooking on its own.

Approximate cooking times for a stuffed* turkey at 325° F

8 to 12 pounds . . .	3 to 4 hours
12 to 16 pounds . .	4 to $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours
16 to 20 pounds . .	$4\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 hours
20 to 26 pounds . .	5 to 6 hours

*for an unstuffed bird, subtract 20 to 40 minutes from the total cooking time

Bread stuffing

Stuffing Components

Mix and match to create your own signature stuffing, or use one of our combinations. The suggested amounts will yield 12 to 16 cups of stuffing.

Bread

(10 to 12 cups diced or torn)

white sandwich
wheat
Italian
whole-grain
sourdough
rye
cornbread

Add Ins

(total of 3 to 5 cups sliced or chopped; choose four to six)

onions (2-3 cups)	leeks (1-1½ cups)
celery (1½-2½ cups)	carrots (1-2 cups)
garlic (1-2 Tbs.)	fennel (1-2 cups)
shallots (½-1½ cup)	dried fruit (½ cup)
bell pepper (½-1 cup)	apple (1-1½ cups)
nuts (½ -1 cup toasted)	oysters (1 cup lightly cooked)
mushrooms (1-2 cups)	sausage (½-1 lb. cooked)
greens (1-1½ cups cooked)	

Seasonings

(to taste)

sage (dried or fresh)
thyme (dried or fresh)
flat-leaf parsley (fresh)
rosemary (use sparingly)
ground cloves, allspice, nutmeg, mace (pinch)
chives (fresh)
salt and pepper

Liquid

(as needed; see
Tips at right)

broth
wine
melted butter
soaking liquid from dried mushrooms
milk
beaten egg (firms the stuffing)

Combinations

- ♦ Classic bread stuffing: white bread, onion, celery, garlic, fresh sage and thyme, salt and pepper.
- ♦ Fennel and escarole: sourdough bread, chopped fennel, chopped escarole, onion, garlic, rosemary, thyme, fennel seed, pine nuts, lemon zest, black pepper.
- ♦ Sweet fruit stuffing: wheat bread, apples, dried cherries, and parsley.
- ♦ Cornbread and sausage stuffing: cornbread, cooked sweet Italian sausage, onion, celery, garlic, bell pepper, thyme, parsley, scallion, chives.
- ♦ Southwestern stuffing: add some smoky dried chile powder and earthy cumin seed to a cornbread stuffing.

How to make stuffing

1 Tear the bread into small pieces or cut it into $\frac{1}{4}$ - to $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch cubes. Dry the bread by spreading it out on a baking sheet and leaving it out uncovered overnight or heat it in a low (275°F) oven until it feels dry, 15 to 20 minutes. (Cornbread doesn't need to be dried; just let it cool completely before breaking it into large crumbs.)

2 Bring out the aromatic flavor of your vegetables by "sweating" them in a little fat. The idea is to soften the vegetables just enough to release their flavors; you want to leave them, especially the celery, a little crunchy to counter the softness of the bread. Covering them with foil or a lid as they cook traps moisture and keeps them from browning.

3 Combine the bread, vegetables, and remaining ingredients with enough liquid to moisten; it should just hold together. It will absorb more juices as it cooks inside the turkey.

4 Taste the stuffing to make sure it's seasoned properly (don't add any egg until you're finished tasting). Stir in the egg, if using.

S T U F F I N G

T I P S

♦ Regardless of the other ingredients, most stuffings benefit from the flavors of sweated onions, celery, and garlic.

♦ A stuffing destined for inside the bird should have just enough moisture to barely cling together when mounded on a spoon. If it's too wet, it can't soak up the juices from the turkey. A stuffing baked in a casserole dish needs a cup or two of broth poured over it to keep it moist during baking.

♦ Stuff the turkey just before roasting. You can make the stuffing ahead and refrigerate it for up to two days, but bring it to room temperature before stuffing the turkey because a cold stuffing will slow the cooking. If you like to add egg to your stuffing, don't add it until just before stuffing the turkey.

♦ Don't overstuff the turkey. The stuffing expands as it absorbs juices, and if it's too tightly packed, it won't cook through.

Leave enough room to fit your whole extended hand into the top of the bird's cavity. Cook any extra stuffing alongside the bird in a casserole dish.

♦ Cook the stuffing to at least 160°F. Check it with an instant-read thermometer inserted all the way into the center of the stuffing. If the turkey is done before the stuffing is, take the turkey out of the oven but spoon the stuffing into a casserole dish and continue to bake it while the turkey rests before carving.

Stuffing Math

Estimate $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 cup stuffing per person, but err on the side of too much rather than too little. After all, leftover stuffing is great on a turkey sandwich.

Gravy with no lumps

G R A V Y T I P S

◆ Don't let the turkey drippings burn. This can happen if the roasting pan gets too hot. Drippings usually won't burn in a heavy-based roasting pan that's just large enough to hold the turkey. If the pan is too big, the area not covered by the bird will get too hot. A too-thin pan can also cause burned juices. But if your pan is too big or flimsy, coarsely chop an onion or two and sprinkle it around the turkey in the pan to act as a heat absorber. If you need to do this, leave the onion out of the giblet broth because the drippings will be oniony enough.

◆ Make the giblet broth a day or two ahead. This gives you time to chill it and remove the fat, plus you won't be taking up extra burner space on the big day.

◆ Turkey liver makes broth bitter. Leave it out.

◆ Tailor the gravy to your taste. The basic gravy technique at right makes a delicious gravy, but after straining you can embellish it without muting the flavor of the turkey. For a bright, fresh flavor, add 1 or 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh herbs (chives, parsley, chervil, basil, or tarragon) a few minutes before serving. For a luxurious touch, stir in 1 or 2 tablespoons of soaked, drained, and chopped dried porcini mushrooms or morels. Strain the soaking liquid through a coffee filter and add that, too. For giblet gravy, finely chop the neck meat and cooked giblets from the stock and heat them in the gravy just before serving. Puréed roasted garlic adds great flavor to gravy and thickens it slightly, too. For a richer gravy, add a little heavy cream.

◆ Gravy should be smooth and pourable, but not watery. If the gravy is too thin, thicken it with a slurry of water and flour. Blend 2 tablespoons flour with 3 tablespoons water and add this, a bit at a time, to the simmering gravy until it thickens. Then simmer the gravy for about 10 minutes to cook off the floury taste.

How to make gravy

- 1 Make a broth from the giblets and neck. Add a halved onion, about 20 small sprigs of parsley, a bay leaf, and enough water to cover. Simmer gently for at least 1½ hours and then strain.
- 2 Pour the drippings from the roasting pan into a large measuring cup to separate the juices from the fat. The juices will sink to the bottom while the fat floats on top. Spoon some of the fat (see Gravy Math, below) back into the pan. Pour off the rest of the fat and discard it, reserving the juices. Put the roasting pan over one or two burners over medium heat.
- 3 Make a roux by adding some flour to the fat in the pan (see Gravy Math for amounts). Whisk the flour and the fat together over medium heat, scraping up the caramelized juices, until you have a smooth paste.
- 4 When the flour smells toasty, whisk in the liquids—the reserved juices, the giblet broth, and any extra broth needed according to Gravy Math. Pour slowly at first as you work out the lumps of roux.
- 5 Simmer the gravy to cook off the floury taste and to thicken it a bit. Continue whisking occasionally for about 10 minutes. Strain the gravy, season it with salt and pepper, and keep it warm until ready to serve.

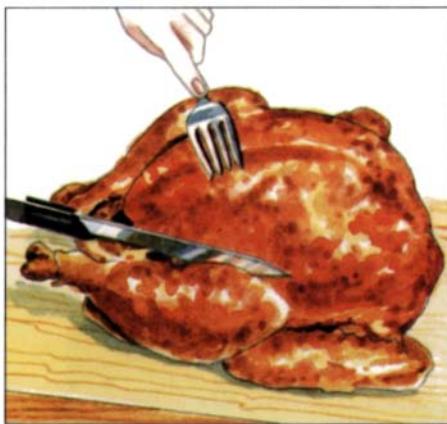
Gravy Math

Figure on about $\frac{1}{3}$ cup gravy per person. For the liquid component, measure the turkey juices (the pan drippings minus the fat) and add enough giblet broth to get the amount of liquid you need. If there still isn't enough liquid, add homemade or canned low-salt chicken or turkey broth.

servings	liquid	fat	flour
6	2 cups	2 Tbs.	3 Tbs.
8	2½ cups	2½ Tbs.	4 Tbs.
10	3½ cups	3 Tbs.	5 Tbs.
12	4 cups	4 Tbs.	6 Tbs.
14	4½ cups	4½ Tbs.	7 Tbs.
16	5 cups	5 Tbs.	8 Tbs.

As a general rule, use about 1 tablespoon fat and about 1½ tablespoons flour for each cup of gravy.

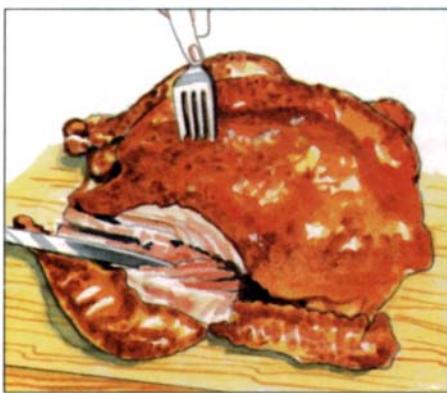
Carving a turkey



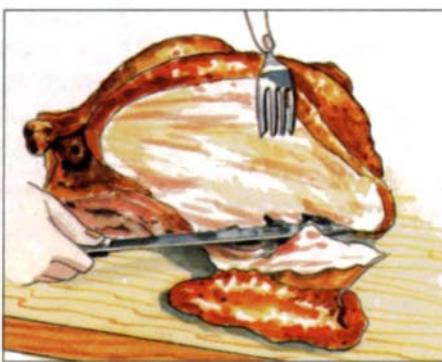
1 Steady your bird with a fork, but try not to stab it or it will lose precious juices. Begin by cutting through the crisp skin that connects the thigh and the breast.



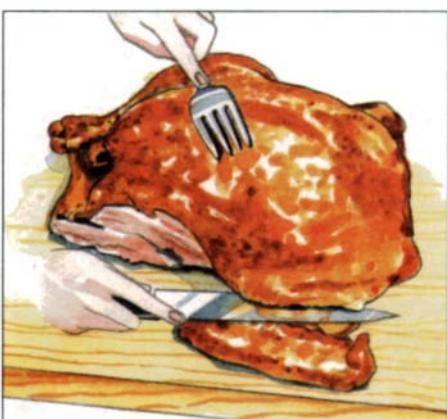
4 Slice the breast meat on the diagonal, parallel to the breastbone. Hold the fork against the breastbone as you carve. Lift off each slice, holding it between the knife and fork, and arrange the slices on a serving platter or plates as you carve. Continue carving until you've sliced all the meat from one side.



2 Slice down and back to where the thigh attaches to the bird. Keep as much meat as you can with the thigh, leaving little on the back. Bend the thigh away from the breast. Slice through the joint to separate the leg, twisting the knife a little until the leg comes off. Carve the leg (see below right).



5 Cut into the joint above the wing to remove it. Or leave it on for now—it helps stabilize the turkey while you carve the other side. Repeat the carving on the other side of the bird if you need to.



3 Make a horizontal cut just above the wing, straight into the turkey as far as you can go. This cut allows the breast meat to fall from the bird as you slice.

CARVING TIPS

◆ Since the knife will have little contact with the work surface, you can carve on a platter, which does the best job of retaining the juices, or on a cutting board with a moat around the edge. Sometimes the juices overflow a moat, so lay a towel under the board or put it in a rimmed baking sheet. If you carve on a platter, you'll still need a cutting board for the legs.

◆ You need enough space for your bird, the cutting board, and a serving platter or a stack of dinner plates. If the table is cramped, set up a separate carving station; a small, sturdy folding table covered with a tablecloth works well. Or carve in the kitchen and arrange the slices with the turkey on the serving platter.

◆ Use a long, sharp carving knife or a chef's knife. A large fork helps keep the bird in place, but a regular-size fork will do in a pinch.

◆ Don't carve more than you need for first helpings. It's better to carve again when it's time for seconds because the meat will stay moister and warmer on the turkey than it will on a serving dish.

Carving the leg

With the leg skin side up and the knee facing you, cut through the joint that separates the drumstick from the thigh. (The joint is always a bit further into the drumstick than you think.) Separate the two. Cut the thigh meat away in strips parallel to the bone. Arrange the strips of meat on a platter or plates as you carve. Slice the drumstick in the same manner or serve it whole.



Turkey terminology

With so many turkeys on the market, trying to choose your holiday bird can be mind-boggling. To help you cut through all the jargon and find the perfect turkey, here's a glossary of the terms you're likely to see.

Fresh vs. frozen

Fresh—A turkey may be labeled "fresh" only if it has never been chilled below 26°F. (Turkey meat, according to the National Turkey Federation, doesn't freeze at 32°F, but at a temperature closer to 26°F.)

Frozen—Turkeys chilled below 0°F must be labeled "frozen." Or, if they're sold already defrosted, you may see "previously frozen" on the label. Most turkey producers agree that freezing adversely affects the texture and taste of the meat.

Hard-chilled or not previously frozen—Turkeys that have been chilled below 26°F, but not below 0°F can't be labeled fresh, but they don't have to be labeled frozen either. If a turkey isn't labeled as either fresh or frozen, it's most likely in this category. This type of bird may also be identified as "hard-chilled" or "not previously frozen."

"Natural"

The term "natural" simply means "no artificial ingredient or color added, and minimally processed." The term makes no reference to the way the turkey was raised.

Beyond fresh: specialty turkeys

Once you've determined if a turkey is fresh or frozen, you'll have other qualities to consider. Many turkeys carry labels like "all-natural," "free-range," and "organic." Still other specialty turkeys don't fall into neat categories but are distinguished by brand.

Organic

The USDA's new National Organic Program requires that turkeys labeled as "organic" be certified by a USDA-accredited certifying agency. A certified organic turkey will have been raised on 100% organic feed, given access to the outdoors, and will never have received antibiotics. The use of hormones in the raising of all poultry is prohibited, certified organic or not.

Free-range

By USDA definition, "free-range" simply means that the birds have access to the outdoors. But what really affects the quality of the meat is how crowded the birds are, not whether they can go outdoors. Some of the best turkeys are therefore not technically free-range, simply because the uncaged birds don't roam outdoors.

Kosher

A kosher label may only be used on poultry that has been processed under rabbinical supervision. The turkeys are grain-fed with no antibiotics and are allowed to roam freely. In addition to being individually processed and inspected, kosher turkeys are soaked in a salt brine, which gives them their distinctive savory character.

Self-basting

A self-basting turkey has been injected with or marinated in a solution of fat and broth or water, plus spices, flavor enhancers, and other "approved substances."

Premium brands

Premium brand turkeys are an increasingly important market for holiday birds. Companies like Murray's, Bell & Evans, Jaindl, Maple Lawn Farms, Koch's, Willie Bird, Eberly's, Empire Kosher, Diestel, and others sell turkeys based on their reputation. Most of these producers claim that the difference between their turkeys and others lies in the quality of the feed their birds get. Most often, there are no animal by-products in the feed and usually no antibiotics. Most of these birds are raised without being caged. The lack of animal fat in their diet and the fact that the birds can move around freely mean that the turkeys grow more slowly than factory-raised birds, so the meat has a chance to develop a richer flavor and denser texture.